October 1986

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Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

PERSONAL FIREWORKS

Modern Times, Modern Art

Andrei Navrozov Explores the Art of Colleen Browning

John Aldridge on the Novel and the Imperial Self

John Sisk on Drugs, Censorship, and Hollywood

Janet Barlow on the Bob Greeneing of America

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No Growth

Over 150 years ago, Martin Van Buren, then Governor of New York, wrote a letter to President Jackson warning him that further development of the "evil" new railroads would disrupt business, boost unemployment, and weaken defense.

January 31, 1829

To: President Jackson

The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as 'railroads'. The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons:

One. If canal boats are supplanted by 'railroads', serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for horses.

Two. Boat builders would suffer and towline, whip and harness makers would be left destitute.

Three. Canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to waging modern war.

For the above-mentioned reasons the government should create an Interstate Commerce Commission to protect the American people from the evils of 'railroads' and to preserve the canals for posterity.

As you may well know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.

Martin Van Buren
Governor of New York

Luckily for America, the leaders of Mr. Van Buren's day, men of vision and hope, did not share his fears.

1844

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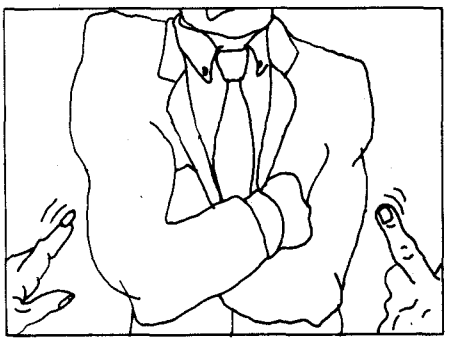

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Chronicles
A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Vol. 10, No. 10, October 1986

PERSONAL FIREWORKS

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Cover art: *Fireworks* by Colleen Browning. Illustrations throughout the text by Anna Mycek-Wodecki.

CHRONICLES (ISSN 0887-5731) is published monthly for $18 per year by The Rockford Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103-7061. Second-class postage paid at Rockford, IL and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CHRONICLES*, P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

Editorial and Advertising Offices: 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103.
Editorial Phone: (815) 964-5054
Advertising Phone: (815) 964-5811
Subscription Department: P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870.

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The Soviet Union is already playing host to large numbers of Americans. It is all part of a general agreement signed in November 1985 in Geneva by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Schevardnadze. The previous US/USSR cultural exchange program was brought to a sudden halt by President Carter in December of 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

What prompts the U.S. decision to resume these exchanges? It is, most probably, the sentiment and politics of peace. Summit conferences demand at least some evidence of progress —even in the soft areas of education and culture. The apparently harmless basis for these exchanges are "equality, mutual benefit, and reciprocity," principles which seem fair until they are seen in action.

Item: The American Bar Association signed an exchange agreement with the Union of Soviet Lawyers. Samuil Zivs, vice president of the ti-Semitic ice presi- ist Com- Shchar- spionage, / signing ABA has, ɔ a legal ofessional d to anti- ɔciety of exchange of Soviet be a more "equal" exchange if the public relations officer of various government agencies, including the USIA, had an exchange with the USJ. Soviet journalists are paid agents of the Soviet state and, most decidedly, are not "watchdogs." Of course, American journalists will not be allowed to have private meetings with anyone who holds views contrary to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In other words, American journalists will have to compromise their professional standards for a guided tour. Moscow bureau chiefs have a hard enough time practicing journalism—much less editors on a two-week tour.

Scientists, too, have problems. The National Academy of Science in 1980 cut their relations with the Soviet Academy of Sciences when Andrei Sakharov, perhaps the greatest living Soviet physicist, was exiled to Gorky for daring to disagree with the official views of the state. Scientists need to be able to determine which of their peers they can meet with. Sakharov is only one case, but there are many others.

In the performing arts? Mstislav Rostopovich, Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and others have, with their feet, voted against the Soviet regime. The artists are so heavily controlled by political masters that many leave their native culture to practice their arts in a foreign one. Art in the Soviet Union is primarily a propaganda asset to be exploited by the state for political purposes. Pianist and exile Vladimir Horowitz recently had a most successful trip to the Soviet Union because he knew the lay of the land and set the necessary terms and conditions.

Under what conditions should exchanges take place? Professional groups should never compromise their professional standards. They should be acutely aware of whether their itineraries are set by themselves or by the Soviet state. Who and what they see and the conditions under which visits take place should be a private and professional matter. Under what rationale should a scientist be forced unknowingly to meet with a stooge of the KGB who masquerades as a world-class scientist? What is the defense of journalists being forced to yet another World War II cemetery to understand Soviet suffering? These same journalists are not allowed to speak with those who have written against the GULAG —a living institution which killed more Soviet citizens than all of World War II.

Americans who satisfy themselves on the serious ethical questions of exchange would do well to recall the part played by Henry Wallace and Owen Lattimore. Mr. Wallace, then Vice President of the United States, and Professor Lattimore of the Office of War Information, visited in 1944 the gold mines of Kolyma in Siberia. Wallace later wrote:

> In North Siberia today,
> Russians have developed urban
> life comparable in general to
> that of our own Northwestern
> States and Alaska.

Since he wrote those words, Robert Conquest, Eugenia Ginzburg, and others have documented the untold suffering going on in Kolyma and the elaborate preparations for Wallace's visit. Estimates vary, but at the time of Wallace's visit, the Soviets were well on their way to a Kolyma death toll of five to seven million. Putting the best face on the matter, Wallace and Lattimore were dupes, useful idiots. But after more than half a century of falling for Potemkin villages, words like "dupe" seem inappropriate for the journalists and intellectuals who allow themselves to be used.

—*Michael Y. Warder*

Women's art—the saga continues. First feminists pressured Anthony Janson to revise his father's classic *History of Art* so that it included a number of obscure painters and sculptors forgotten by everyone outside the Women's Studies movement. Now "women" will have their own art museum in the nation's capital. Due to open next April, the National Museum of Women in the Arts will be housed in a former Masonic temple, just two blocks from the White House. The primary organizer of the new museum

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instruct us in the possibilities of freedom, adventure, or individual integrity. Except for the two or three mostly third-rate novelists whose talent for self-caricature and bitchery has endeared them to talk-show audiences that know nothing of their books, the best of our writers today are ignored by the popular media unless and until they are arrested for disturbing the peace or manage to win the Nobel Prize. It is inconceivable that there is a novelist among us at this time who would be met by reporters at Kennedy Airport as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, even writers like Louis Bromfield and Pearl Buck used regularly to be met when their ships arrived in New York from Europe.

We may pass over the more obvious and clichéd reasons why these things are so: how artists of all kinds have lost celebrity status in a time when only regular media appearance can, however temporarily, confer such status; how the novel has declined in influence with the decline in the habit of serious reading and with the rise of the dictatorship now exercised by television over the limited powers of mass public attention. These are factors we may cite without engaging the more complex realities of the problem. It is much more to the point to suggest that the authority of the novel never has been and probably never can be viewed as separable from the nature and quality of the human experience which, at any historical moment, may form its central subject matter. It is even possible that the novel will be most deeply influential at those moments when it is able to explore areas of experience that are *not yet* completely familiar to the reading public, thus functioning in its classic role as literally a bringer of the news, a discoverer of what is indeed novel.

These moments will usually coincide with periods of profound social dislocation such as the rise of the mercantile middle class out of the collapsing order of feudalism—a process in which the novel as we know it in fact began—or they may be typified by radical changes in manners and morals of the kind that tend to follow major wars. They may also occur during the emergence of ethnic, racial, regional, and sexual subcultures in which the initial struggle out of feudalism of the middle class is recapitulated in the struggle for freedom, acceptance, and personal autonomy of Jews, blacks, provincial Southerners or Midwesterners, women, or homosexuals—groups, in short, that have become newly conscious of themselves and the special nature of their minority or regional experiences.

Such central social transformations have over the past century provided the American novel with a continuously replenishing supply of vital materials, and usually their vitality has depended in very large measure on the factor of novelty, the opportunity afforded novelists by historical accident to express for the first time hitherto unknown or unexplored modes of feeling and being, new experiences that in some ultimate way were working to reshape the character of our national life and in the process were introducing fresh perspectives from which to envision the individual in some significantly altered relation to that life. These experiences will of course have been shared by some perhaps substantial part of the reading public. But they will *not* have been made understandable or imaginatively available to the public until recreated and evaluated in the work of an important novelist.

The history of the 20th-century novel in this country might in fact be described as an evolutionary development in which each successive generation of novelists has discovered and appropriated to its particular creative use one or more of the emerging social situations of its age, then has gradually—or in some cases very quickly—depleted it of its potential as imaginative material, in time, as a rule, with its absorption into the homogenizing system of the established national community. There seems always to be a moment when a nascent subculture, whether racial, ethnic, regional, or sexual, is, because of its newness or its bizarre character, a particularly fertile ground for the novel, just as there comes a moment when its materials will have grown familiar to the point of becoming unusable clichés and will lose authority to a more recently emerged subculture possessing newer and as yet unfamiliar materials.

This is a major reason why it is possible to speak of the stages in the growth of the American novel in terms of geographical locale and minority-group interest—and the process has repeatedly involved the conquest, consolidation, and finally the depletion and abandonment of new territories of social and imaginative experience. Beginning early in the 19th century and continuing through the years following the Second World War, we have had the New England novel of Hawthorne and Melville; the novel of the developing Western frontier of James Fenimore Cooper; the more deeply Western novel of Mark Twain; the international and New York novel of James and Wharton; the many works appearing after the turn of this century which dramatized the plight of the Midwestern and Southern adolescent struggling to escape the suffocations of the small town; other works which explored the *usually destructive consequences* of the adolescent's escape—to New York, Long Island, Paris, and the South of France. Later during the 30's there were the large numbers of novels depicting the new Depression-created subculture of the economically dispossessed.

After World War II, the racial and ethnic novel came into authority as the Anglo-Saxon Midwestern experience ceased to be the typifying experience of most American writers. During that same period the Southern renaissance initiated by Faulkner reached maturity in the work of several writers who were among the last to derive their primary materials from geographical locale, materials which in their case were ultimately devitalized as a result of the proliferation of novels composed of self-parodistic Southernesque formulations. At the present time the best of our novelists seem, for reasons later to be discussed, to have turned away from the direct presentation of regional and subcultural experience, leaving the field largely to the newer women writers who, now that the homosexuals have had their day, are speaking for what may well be the sole remaining American subculture still capable of providing relatively fresh materials for the novel.

An obsessive hunger for new experience and a disposition to seek it in the actualities of the social world rather than produce it imaginatively—these have been highly visible characteristics of our writers for as long as we have had a distinctively national literature. But what is perhaps less evident is how often their pursuit of novelty in material is joined with a preoccupation with the pursuit and explora-

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tion of novelty as a literary theme. If in the traditional European novel, characters tend to move in an environment already discovered and subdued by law, class hierarchy, and established custom, experience for Americans is an entity actively sought as destination and quarry, a dynamic and elusive state of both being and perpetual becoming which needs to be tracked down, grappled with, and brought under the control of the will and imagination. By the same token, dramatic conflict in the European novel has classically been generated within the givens of the established culture. Hell is indeed other people and the institutions they have created to force individual needs into harmony with communal interests, while the resolution of conflict is most often attained through the achievement of some more or less satisfactory mediation between individual and community. So the European novel again and again comes to rest in serenity and reconciliation, reminding us that salvation may perhaps be found only in an enlightened and usually chastened realignment of personal desire with public necessity.

The American novel tends by contrast to remain in a state of uncompromised adversary motion. Its characters move on or walk out at the end rather than regain admission to the social fold. The thrust of our imagination is resolutely kinetic, and the driving impulse is to seek salvation in escape from community and in the confrontation of unknown possibility. It is not surprising that we have come to endow the search for new experience with mystical and sacramental meaning. To leave behind the known and, *because known*, commonplace reality is to invest in the promise of finding an "elsewhere" that will provide a second chance for being and consciousness, a regeneration of sensibility in the discovery of the authentic sources of the self.

Cooper's intrepid and simple-minded frontiersmen, Melville's seagoing pioneers, Hemingway's seekers after the holy communion of precise language and true emotion, Fitzgerald's oddly ascetic sentimentalists of wealth and glamour—all are fantasy projections of an essentially religious view of experience, a belief in the possibility of some form of beatific transcendence to be achieved through submersion in elemental nature, the exploration of instinctual truth, or the discovery of an earthly paradise of infinite richness and perfect beauty. It would seem that the experience of the frontier along with its attendant myths founded on such ideas as that the corruptions of civilization can be left behind, that there exist inexhaustible territories of fresh challenge and adventure to be conquered, that the meaningful life is a continuous romantic pilgrimage into the virgin unknown, and that man is most noble as a pilgrim in the wilderness and closest to God when he is closest to nature—these have all obviously done much to program our psychic expectations just as they have helped to form a central thematic preoccupation of our novels.

But there has also been a contrary impulse at work behind the American novelistic imagination, and it may well derive from what remains of one of the original functions of the novel as a form, which was to provide critical and satirical commentary on the excesses of the medieval romance. For even as our novels have expressed, and often seemed to celebrate, our romantic fantasies and aspirations to transcendence, they have also served—as a rule through the indirections of irony, metaphor, and ambiguity—as stern moral monitors of them. If there was a strong mythic and mythologizing dimension to the frontier experience, there was also an even stronger dimension of practical reality, physical hardship, privation, and danger—the inescapable limitations imposed by the environment upon the flights of the pioneer imagination. The conquest of the wilderness may have depended upon the existence of the dream of an earthly paradise, but survival in the wilderness depended upon the development of a hardy and altogether disenchanted pragmatism. Americans, we know, have never been at ease with the schizophrenia thus induced in them, and many of our most important novels have recorded with powerful intensity the anguish and frustration it has caused.

From the first genuinely American fiction of Cooper through the fables of Vonnegut, the pattern has repeatedly been one in which romantic aspiration or a certain idealistic vision of reality is subjected to the test of experience and shown to be empty pretense or illusion, founded on false values or meretricious hopes rather than on premises which take into account the practical necessities and the frailties of the human condition. The Ur-figures are of course Cooper's Leatherstocking and Melville's Ahab, both of whom are men obsessed with an idea of godliness and personal purity and who pursue it in the conquest of, or escape into, the sanctity of nature. Leatherstocking is overtaken and finally destroyed by the evils of the civilization he was presumptuous and innocent enough to try to flee, while Ahab presumes beyond the limits of human power and is defeated by a force that is both natural and cosmic.

Twain and James were both champions of the natural moral sense, that innate power of knowing right from wrong which Thomas Jefferson believed to be part of the common property of all mankind. But both writers also knew that such a sense is a fragile weapon for survival in a world in which the *universal* possession of this sense is, in actual fact, proven again and again to be itself an illusion. In Twain's case it is the adult world into which one day Huck and Tom, like Holden Caulfield, will have to grow up. For James, the continuing metaphor is the society of Europe in which Isabel Archer's and Lambert Strether's trusting American ingenuousness is educated into a sullied comprehension of the nature of evil and the necessity for personal responsibility. The emphasis in Fitzgerald is not dissimilar. Gatsby's virginity of heart, oddly augmented by the illegality of his business enterprises, is despoiled by the greater because morally lawless power of the Buchanans' carelessness and cynicism, their better understanding of the expedient ways of the world. In Faulkner, a society basing its vision of itself on certain assumptions about a half-mythic, half-actual heritage of honor and nobility is overcome by the barbarous, wholly pragmatic Snopeses and their ilk, even as it is eaten away from within by false pride, blood guilt, and decades of duplicity perpetrated in the name of honor.

The list could be extended, but significantly enough, appropriate examples become scarcer as we approach closer to the present time. While it is true that the 20th century has been remarkable for the accelerating vengeance with

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which novelists throughout the world have carried on the process of demythifying experience and eviscerating our illusions, it seems also to be true that at some point the dialectical balance had radically shifted. For we now suffer from a surfeit of negation and an apparent failure of understanding of just what values have been negated, what were the illusions we once mistook for truth, and what, if any, remain to be exposed. In a time when there is much evidence to indicate that fresh areas of social experience for the novel's exploration have sharply diminished in number, we must also confront the fact that the great demythifying function of the novel seems to have come to an end in a cultural situation in which there seems to be little left to demythify and which has actually been engaged for years in a self-destructive process of demythifying itself. In almost every sector of human experience and endeavor—in politics, education, business, sexuality, marriage, the having and rearing of children—contemporary American society is itself performing the job once performed by our novelists, stripping away layers of idealistic assumption, hypocrisy, illusions of purpose, meaning, integrity, principle, and responsibility and exposing the emptiness or the corruption or the insanity beneath.

This has, of course, profoundly affected the nature of life in America at the present time, hence, inevitably, the nature of the contemporary novel and our response to it. For if we once found pleasure, instruction, even perhaps a form of Aristotelian purgation of the emotions of pity and fear through seeing, in so many novels of the past, our idealistic aspirations subjected to the test of actuality and exposed as mistaken or illusory, we did so in part because aspiration in its conflict with actuality was endowed with virtue, even when affirmed in the face of hopeless odds. The urge for self-transcendence in the struggle to defend some abstract ideal of dignity, moral principle, or social responsibility was revealed as a response to some deep necessity within the human spirit, a hubristic challenge to the power of the gods in which defeat was finally the measure of the significance, even the tragic heroism, of that necessity.

Today, in most of the novels that, for artistic reasons, should be able to make a serious claim upon our attention, we find reflected a complex of conditions and responses of a radically different order. To the extent that they contain any realistic portrait of the actualities of the present time, they tend to dramatize not our hopes but our feelings of generalized frustration and disappointment, not our need for transcendence but our paranoid fears that some obscure force, some metaphysical CIA, has robbed us of the means and the possibility and is bent on manipulating us in directions and for reasons we cannot understand and that have nothing to do with us personally. In fact, it is a characteristic feature of some of our most serious fiction that in it both the ideal and the reality of individual self-discovery and transcendence as central thematic preoccupations have been replaced by a dark fantasy in which prophecy and paranoia join to protect a horror of universal conspiracy and mass apocalypse. At the center of that fantasy one discovers once again the classic modernist representation of the human condition: the dislocated self no longer sustained by the social structures and idealistic assumptions of the past, trapped in a demythologized and therefore demoralized present, dying a little more each day as the forces of entropy deepen and accelerate throughout the world.

This is not a vision capable of giving us very much further instruction. Its meaning has been canceled by the cliché it has become, and it has lost its former adversary function: it is no longer a heretical corrective of the pieties behind our illusions. But it is, nonetheless, a reflection, however oblique and metaphorical, of a state of mind and condition of life we recognize as common to the present time, even as we also recognize that one of the most frustrating features of the present time is precisely that the vision of apocalypse, a relic of another age and so thoroughly devitalized by excessive literary use, should still have such pertinence to us. Yet there can be no question but that the conditions of which that vision was initially the radical expression have become more visible and seemingly more

A SCRAP OF MOONLIGHT

by Martin Seymour-Smith

Walked in the rain to post you a letter.
You, who won't see me, you are so sick and sad.
Wanted at last to be simple, had
Need to speak straightforwardly at last.
So I said aloud in the dusk-drizzle: 'I
Love you' but dismissed it as prosy chatter,
An exhibitionistic matter;
Regressed to the over-complex past,
In which mind ruled heart, and *Thou* wert ruled by *I*,
Feelings always tainted by some half-lie.
Gave up: the trash of governments,
Ferocious fanatics fighting without sense,
The mephitis of the incruciated
Fribble turned to demonic scold;
All the poor, tormented, excruciated,
All the newly demented, love-robbed old. . . .
That at least seemed reason to be bitter. . . .

No excuse. Nothing of that in me not bad.
Drawn *immer schlimmer* from the indignatory
Sewer—no more to it than love-lorn litter
Or some man who says of Mercy: 'Plan it!'

Sat in the darkness here, knew this, uneasily
Lamented the gap between false and true,
How I, how we, could ever span it.

Then, as the Moon sailed out and into view,
Saw the uninfected fact of you,
Your renewal rinsed of my self-love:
Could hope at last, with no bitterness
For love in everyone—and knew that meant me, too.

Martin Seymour-Smith, formerly poetry editor of Truth *and* Scotsman, *has written several volumes of poetry, including* All Devils Fading, Tea With Miss Stockport, *and* Reminiscences of Norma. *He is also author of* Robert Graves *and* Poets Through Their Letters.

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malevolent in our own age. We have, in fact, institutionalized all the famous old disaster syndromes and so assimilated them into our way of life and patterns of thought that disaster has become not only our central preoccupying experience but our principal fantasy of salvation. If religions of the past offered promise of some form of transcendental redemption, disaster holds out the possibility of infinite and deliciously horrible forms of damnation, the ultimate titillation to orgasm of world holocaust, which in our ultimate boredom is one of the very few experiences left that is likely to bring us to feeling.

We now take it for granted—and the fact creates around us a subliminal envelope of rehabilitating drama—that we inhabit a world in which violence of any and every kind can erupt anywhere and everywhere at any time with or without provocation or meaning. This is a world that some few of us experience every day, but for the rest of us it exists as an abstraction projected and often seemingly created by the reality-manufacturing and reality-fantasizing media of television and film. Our direct experience is usually of another kind of abstraction, an urban or suburban noncommunity in which we are perhaps most conscious of floating in disconnection between business and home, passing and being passed by strangers in the void. Home is the place of brief refuge from the void, where family offers a substitute for community even as house functions as a frontier stockade erected against the disorienting ambiguities of existence in noncommunity. Business or profession provides an illusion of connection with people whose only connection with us and with one another is conterminous activity within the same "facility" or "structure."

At intervals, which have grown less and less frequent with the passage of time, the separately orbiting entities of business and home may, for ceremonial reasons, be momentarily joined, and strangers from the one will be imported into the other, given food and enough to drink to ensure that they will not be able to notice that they have nothing to say to one another. Anesthesia is the only possible means of coping with a situation in which nothing can be communicated among people for whom the terms and materials of communication, the shared histories and common assumptions of purpose and value, have ceased to exist. Yet such a situation is only the microcosmic form of the abstraction projected by the media, the vast unstructured and dehistorified macrocosm composed of large and portentous or trivial and meaningless happenings occurring in some remote elsewhere and enacted upon strangers or stranger-celebrities made recognizable by the regular appearance of their faces on the screen but who are known to us only because, and only so long as, they are there.

The physical dislocation of the individual from direct relation to his social and public experience has its correlative in an ideological dislocation that has grown increasingly visible over the last 10 or 15 years. There has been a deepening and ever more obsessive preoccupation during this period with the nature and problems not so much of the individual life as of society as a whole—or put another way, the individual life transvaluated into a projection of, and a vexation laid upon, society as a whole. It is from society seen as a corporate entity that people now try to derive what sense they can of communal relationship and identity, and the effort has most often been made through declarations of allegiance to various political, sexual, racial, or ethnic groups, membership in which is based scarcely at all upon concrete experiences and shared backgrounds (as was the case with minority and subculture membership in the past) but rather upon problems that are conceived of in theoretical and statistical terms as being peculiar to a particular group.

Even as personal connection is sought through identification with a group, the group becomes a collective abstraction to which relationship cannot be directly achieved and, therefore, in which further abstraction is the inevitable result. If the loss of the older forms of community has projected us into a formless sociological void, our need to replace community with group membership has projected us even further into the void. For it causes us to see ourselves not as ourselves but as increments of such subcultural categories as female, homosexual, Chicano, or black, with a further erosion of our sense of the integrity and uniqueness of the individual self.

It follows from this that the currently obsessive quest for a preformulated "role" in some collective has replaced to a large degree the personal quest for a purpose in life and, not incidentally, is depriving the novel of one of its most vital traditional themes. For the search, in all its agony and great potential for destructive risk, that once went on within the precincts of the individual's concrete struggle with his environment tends now to be viewed as a problem belonging to a general social category, a problem with which the individual cannot be expected to cope and, therefore, which is to be projected upon an unjust and oppressive society or politicized into an "issue" which the technocratic powers of legislative reform operating somewhere out there in the void will be required to engage.

There inevitably emerges a state of mind having as its base the belief that life in general is not an experience to be lived but a problem to be solved. The having of experience, from which one may or may not eventually derive certain personal answers, becomes a procedure for which methods of analysis and resolution have been scientifically formulated. This has led to a shift in the individual consciousness from a sense of being the subject of experience to a sense of being its object, so that one examines the experience of other objects in order to ease one's own feeling of unreality at being seen as an object, as another laboratory specimen being acted upon rather than living actively. The displacement of instinct by technological method, with all that it contributes to a further deepening of the passive, dreamlike quality of personal existence, is one of the most deranging phenomena of contemporary life, and it is perhaps the most morbid expression of our desire to die out of the hazards and mistakes of personal existence and enter the nirvana of risk-free problem-manipulation where all difficulties are resolvable in a state of serenity which only death can approximate.

It may be paradoxical that this displacement appears to have increased rather than lightened the burden of narcissism that has so heavied the atmosphere of the present time. The individual has not been freed by the view that life is a problem to be solved by the right application of technological method. Rather, he has been forced to become obsessed

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with the technology of all his personal processes, to see them, as he sees himself and other people, as objects to be analyzed and evaluated for their correctness according to various behavioral measurements and sociological surveys. Since instinct or simply intelligence can no longer be trusted as a guide to feeling and conduct, since the precedent of the past is considered an inhibition from which we are struggling to escape, only technique is left—technique forced into the service of a profoundly narcissistic preoccupation.

The development—if that it can be called—from self-preoccupation as a pervasive psychic condition of our society to novels that are specifically about self-preoccupation reaches its logical culmination in novels that are themselves self-preoccupied—it being apparently the case that the overriding concerns of a culture at any particular time in history will find their reflection, however obliquely, in the kinds of fiction the culture produces. If, furthermore, we have, at one extreme, novels (like Philip Roth's) whose subject is self-preoccupation and, at the other extreme, novels (like John Barth's) whose subject is preoccupation with themselves, then it may well be that we are discovering only that the coin of narcissism has, in fact, two sides. Novels of the first sort seem to be saying that nothing is real or important except the self and the processes by which the self has become obsessively aware of this fact. Novels of the second sort seem to be saying—even belligerently proclaiming—that nothing is real or important except themselves and the processes by which, as artistic constructs, they were created—including of course the authors' lamentations over the bewildering variety of alternative ways in which they might have been created.

John Barth has asserted that reality is a bore and therefore does not deserve to be treated in fiction. Yet this is merely a restatement in other terms of the widespread belief that experience outside the familiar and beloved precincts of the self—whether as person or as novel—is irrelevant, trivial, too incoherent and grotesque to be understandable, and indeed very probably a bore as well.

Such a belief, in whatever terms it is phrased, would seem to prophesy, even herald, the imminent extinction of the novel as a medium for making a realistic statement about the nature of our collective social experience, just as the arbitrary and often quite cynical use of the Barthian "versions" approach to experience would seem to express a fatal loss of respect for the integrity of both experience and the novel form. Yet it might be argued that much that passes for reality in the contemporary world is in fact a bore—as is, inevitably, so much of the fiction which reflects its boringness or turns away from reflecting it because of boredom. The self as a person or as a novel contemplating his, her, or its own intimate processes is deemed by the writers of such fiction to be all that remains worthy of their regard, even as we recognize that there are others like Bellow, Mailer, and Updike whose work stands in strong rebuttal to this assumption.

I have written at some length about the various ways in which self-preoccupation resulting from the loss of a sense of personal connection with the environment has become a dominant subject matter of our contemporary fiction. But fiction has only given imaginative form to what has become the dominant condition of contemporary American life, the symptoms of which are visible everywhere but perhaps with the greatest clarity in the two most populous precincts of the national neurosis: our twin obsessions with physical health and with death—twin because, while seemingly contradictory, they are in fact closely complementary.

It may be commonplace to observe that preoccupation with dying results from a suspicion that one is not and has not been living. And the same might be said about preoccupation with the state of one's physical health. It is when the experience of life ceases to be challenging and adventurous and fails to occupy one's full attention that one begins to be concerned about its inevitable termination in death, as well as about the condition of the organism whose efficient functioning is alone capable of postponing the onset of death. After all, there may be something amiss with the muscle tone or the coronary arteries that is causing this feeling that all is not well with the world, that life has lost its flavor and direction, along with the consequent feeling of generalized frustration and malaise. Presumably Henry James knew what he had in mind when, in *The Ambassadors*, he has Lambert Strether beseech Little Bilham to "live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what *have* you had?" But now the suspicion weighs heavily upon us that not only do we no longer understand what it means to live all you can, we no longer know whether we are having our lives or how to go about having them or what to do if we discover that we are not having them.

Through a process partly of systematic demythification and partly of natural attrition, we have become disassociated from many of the beliefs and psychological connections that might once have enabled us to answer these questions. We have abolished the concept of an afterlife. The shrinkages of history and territory have forced us to put aside the dream of secular transformation wherein one was able to pull up stakes and move on to a frontier of fresh challenge and new becoming or, as was the case with James, to possess life fully through deep immersion in the sacramental waters of the actual, the dream that with the Renaissance began to reconstitute the psychic vitality of Western Europe and that made the utopian ideal of the New World both a visionary promise and an apparently attainable practical goal. We have witnessed in our own time a profound disillusionment with the values of personal aspiration and the possibilities of material improvement, a perhaps worldwide narrowing of expectations in virtually all categories of human endeavor. One senses everywhere a recognition that the age as a whole has run through its emotional and spiritual capital, that the various modes of life alternative to our present one have all been tried or are not worth trying, that tomorrow and tomorrow will be no better than or different from the seemingly endless and pointless today.

It is not remarkable, therefore, that we should now inhabit a culture distinguished by its lack of a sense of present purpose and future direction, by a political doctrine based on a worship of the ordinary and a fear of excellence, and by the magnitude of its obsession with mortality. If all one can hope to experience is one's physical life up to the moment it is ended in death, then one's overriding concern

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is to preserve the state of physical life, however unrewarding it may be, for as long as possible and to seek distraction from the prospect of death as best one can.

The two attitudes—the suspicion that life has become empty of meaning and the desire nevertheless to avoid confronting its meaningless end in death—are well-dramatized in our tendency to subject to morbid scientific scrutiny all the conditions and actions of existence, whether they be sex, personal relations, old age, how to win and maintain power over others, or how to watch a loved one die of cancer without feeling anything at all. It is a tendency stemming either from the belief that life is so terrible that to be endured it must be distanced from the personal through the vocabulary of behavioral phenomena—the bloodless language of the computer and the laboratory—or that it is so trivial and insignificant that it needs the rhetorical inflation of being described as a science. Old age and death, for example, have become subjects one takes courses in because they have lost the meaning once given them by community and religion and because taking courses in them is a way of denying their reality. The achievement of an A in a course on death must be an indication that one has mastered and so, by implication, has triumphed over the subject matter. If life is a problem to be solved, then death, the inescapable solution, is a problem to be defused of problemality, so that one will be able to live without dread with the fact of death in the same way that one lives without joy with the experience of life.

Psychiatry, of course, is our more openly benevolent form of scientific scrutiny, a creator rather than a destroyer of mystery, a way of remythifying what elsewhere has been demythified. Over most of the century we have looked to it to give us back our sense of wonder over the most delicious and worst-kept secret of all, the nature of ourselves, who are we really, and what is the true, albeit hidden meaning of what has happened to us in our lives. Psychiatry long ago took over the function of that part of our minds that once dealt directly with experience simply by confronting and coping with it and, in the process, gave us a sense of the concrete dramatic relation existing between the self and the environment. When that relation began to be disrupted, we began to need help in discovering who we are, and psychiatry supplied it by replacing our now atrophied powers of self-understanding with its omniscient technology and focusing our attention on the only environment we had left to confront, ourselves alone in limbo with our fascinating fantasies.

On a more profound level of crassness, television and the many films manufactured solely to induce terror have become another kind of substitute source for mystery and adventurous engagement, and they have done so by providing an external, albeit fictitious object for the fantasies which psychiatry has directed toward the beloved subject of ourselves. Simply by changing television channels or attending fright movies, we are able to experience contingency and achieve adrenal alert without of course experiencing actual risk. We can enter vicariously into a wide range of ghastly and perilous possibilities, most of them involving a regressive journey backward in human time to a savage ancestral environment teeming with delicious threats of murder and mayhem, and for a little while we have restored the vital connection between ourselves and a reality exterior to and beyond the control and comprehension of ourselves. If most of us are afflicted with the Bob Slocum syndrome, so sensitively diagnosed by Joseph Heller in *Something Happened*, and inhabit an environment too bland and benevolent to be either confronted or defied, then how restorative to the Idic tissues it is to be transported imaginatively to a world in which enemies are real and ferocious and we are forced to cope once again with the fundamental exigencies of survival.

It matters not at all that the raw materials of mass media drama are derived mostly from the urban ghetto environment of the present time. For the majority of the audience, that environment might as well have existed 10,000 years ago, and its great appeal is that it jolts us out of our psychic sleep with the electrifying reminder, brought up out of the swampy depths of primal memory, that there might, after all, have once been something genuine and menacing outside the solipsistic bubble in which the unrealities of contemporary life have obliged us to become enclosed.

In view of this, it might be said that the currently ubiquitous figure of the jogger is the perfect emblematic image of our age, the supreme embodiment in physical terms of the imperious self-absorption with which, in technological terms, psychiatry has so thoroughly indoctrinated us. The jogger, alone in limbo not with his fantasies but with his precious physique, oblivious of his surroundings, attentive only to the workings of his biological machine, sweating and straining to create through the maximum enhancement of his strength a vitality he cannot discover in the experience of his time—no rough beast its hour come round at last, but an ordinary obsessive soul jogging toward the Bethlehem of his dream of immortality, running to prolong a life into which he might well fear that he will not be born before he dies, that his hour will never come round at last or at all.

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles*:

Popular Wisdom

"Since everyone recognizes the correctness of stereotypes, minorities are in fact harmed, not protected, by the contemporary pretense that ethnic commonplaces are unfounded."

—from "The Truth in Stereotypes"
by Steven Goldberg

ALSO

Thomas Molnar lays bare the anatomy of clichés

E. Christian Kopff defends "the text" against deconstructionists and legal positivists

John Aldridge sniffs out the novel's remains in Robert Coover's closet

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THE DOORS OF DECEPTION *by. John P. Sisk*

One of the many sociological uses of Hollywood is its dramatic availability when things go wrong in America. Michael Satchell, for instance, has raised the question in *Parade* of whether the movies by too often glamorizing drugs and alcohol encourage their use among young people. He cites Goldie Hawn, Jane Fonda, Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, and JoBeth Williams as actresses who "have been shown smoking marijuana in millions of American homes." He impresses actor Paul Newman, whose son died after mixing alcohol and valium, with "a list of sixty films with positive drug messages," and he quotes Senator William V. Roth's conviction that movie stars "are great role models for young people—movies are a glamour industry—and when drugs are shown in a favorable light it has very real impact." Some critics, says Satchell, want the Motion Picture Association of America to supplement its current rating system with letters ("SA") that indicate "substance abuse"—especially given the strong possibility that Hollywood might have to choose between self-censorship and government censorship.

Satchell's article makes it clear that there are still people around who believe that the moviemakers have a moral obligation to take a stand against drug abuse. Does this imply their agreement with the ancient conviction that the theater, and the arts generally, cannot be subversive to the best interests of the individual and society without being aesthetically false? The question is hardly a subject for *Parade*, but it does take us back to times when moralizing critics of the theater had a less complicated task. In the Elizabethan period, when he wrote that "the groundwork of comedies is love, cozenage, flattery, bawdry, sly conveyance of whoredom," Stephen Gosson could assume that not even his playgoing opposition would contend that society might be better off with a little more bawdry and whoredom. When a century later Jeremy Collier anatomized the "licentiousness and irreligion" of the Restoration theater, he was addressing readers whom he knew would agree with him, Aristotle, Horace, and Ben Jonson that the end of all the arts is the public good, however those readers might on occasion enjoy the licentiousness. The public morality, often enough honored in the breach rather than the observance, had not yet been reduced to a cultural *épistème* from which the authentic person was expected to free himself. If Sir John Vanbrugh appeared to argue in *The Provoked Wife* that marriage "is a poor, sordid slavery," he could not, like Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine, plead his First Amendment rights against potential censors.

As a defender of the public morality, Collier also had the advantage of not having to concern himself with the possible bad effects of actors and actresses as role models. He would hardly have approved of the adulterous off-stage life of Nell Gwyn and Elizabeth Barry (mistresses respectively to Charles II and the Earl of Rochester), and he seems to have believed with Ben Jonson that "'tis impossible to be a good poet without being a good man," but the play was the thing. In a celebrity-dazzled and media-hyped culture such as ours, his critical life would be more complicated; a pot-smoking Nell Gwyn in a play he otherwise approved of might make him sound more like Jerry Falwell and less like Walter Kerr.

We cannot imagine a society without role models, whether classic superachievers like Ulysses, home-run hitters like Reggie Jackson, or rock singers like Madonna, but it is hard to believe that public entertainers have ever had the role-modeling power that they have in our society. Hollywood realized early the extent to which this power could threaten its best interests; hence the efforts to keep more liberated performers within at least hailing distance of the public morality and to expect the cooperation of press agents when they got too far out of line. A Fatty Arbuckle scandal was not only morally messy but expensive.

At the same time, however, it was expensive not to exploit the role-modeling capacities of the performers, and in any event the nature of motion pictures made the

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exploitation inevitable. Like the aristocracy or the very rich—or like "true" artists for that matter—they had to be represented as a special breed marching to a drummer that did not beat for ordinary mortals and blessed with the moral dispensations proper to special breeds. So the term "movie star" has become a metaphor for an enhanced form of existence, thereby making its contribution to the general uneasiness about the consequences of the public morality. Perhaps that morality really is a conspiracy against the potential for a life lived at peak intensity; perhaps the equivalence of glamorous achievement with unconventional conduct implies a standard of honesty and courage that rebukes the pusillanimous hypocrisy of the rest of us.

It is not hard to see why the argument that it has a special obligation to censor its treatment of drugs makes Hollywood uneasy. It senses, of course, that more than the censorship of drugs is at stake. Hollywood as a role-modeling institution is vulnerable to a variety of complaints, each of which poses the possibility of outside censorship or more inside censorship than it likes to think about. Many of these complaints stem from the antiestablishment bias which Hollywood shares with literature, drama, and the arts generally. This bias involves the convenient convention that the best and most profitable films are likely to be those that counter (when they do not expose as fraudulent) the normalities and pieties of bourgeois life.

When established stars bring their glamorous selves to roles in such films, it is easy for them to have the effect of endorsing antiestablishment attitudes and conduct even when the films themselves do not. Paul Newman's sincerity about the menace of role-modeling drug-abusers cannot be doubted, but what would he say about the role-modeling power of himself and Robert Redford in movies like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or *The Sting*, in which conduct conventionally recognized as criminal is presented in a favorable light, not simply because of the way the movies are made but because of the established star-power the actors bring to it? Noting this inevitable consequence of the star-system, a modern Jeremy Collier might suggest the draconian corrective of a production system in which all parties involved are always utterly anonymous—the result being "pure" movies rather than movies that build on one another, like chapters in the ongoing biographies of the actors and *auteur*-directors.

There is another reason, however, for Hollywood's uneasiness with the drug issue—a reason that is not Hollywood-specific. Drugs are by long-standing reputation not only liberating agencies but the natural enemies of censorship. It is quite possible to believe that some drugs do some people a lot of damage but to believe at the same time that drugs are truth-revealers, that, to use Aldous Huxley's phrase, they open "doors of perception" which repressive authorities would like to keep closed. This means that ultimately, if often precariously, drugs are on the side of the arts, particularly when the arts are valued more for truth-telling than for aesthetic excellence. It also means that drugs are on the side of pornography, which, since the Marquis de Sade set up his adult bookstore in the Palais-Royal early in the French Revolution, has continued to oppose all bourgeois censors with a liberating counter-morality, sometimes so persuasively that the pornographer is identified as a true artist living intrepidly on the frontier beyond which is the domain of the forces of life.

The list of 19th- and 20th-century writers whose work has been to a significant degree associated with drugs is impressive: George Crabbe, Thomas De Quincey, Samuel Coleridge, Novalis, Edgar Allan Poe, James Thomson, Charles Baudelaire, Francis Thompson, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. Of course, some of these writers have testified to the delusions and horrors of addiction—for instance, Coleridge, De Quincey, Baudelaire, and Burroughs. At the same time, there is a substantial body of critical and scholarly literature that exposes the religious, psychological, philosophical, biological, medical, and social misconceptions that have attended the discovery and use of laudanum, hashish, opium, mescaline, heroin, LSD, PCP, cocaine, the various designer drugs, and ecstasy (MDMA) as means of making more endurable the deprivations and sufferings attendant on human consciousness. All of this literature would seem to add up to a resounding endorsement of Kafka's observation in "The Great Wall of China":

> You can hold back from the suffering of the world, you have free permission to do so and it is in accordance with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could have avoided.

But as Kafka and the Baudelaire who wrote *The Artificial Paradise* knew, few people are willing to run the risk of this paradox. There is every reason to believe that the search for the perfect drug—consciousness-expanding, love- and health-enhancing, reality-revealing, one-world-creating, nonaddictive, and safer than aspirin—will continue apace. The search is one consequence of the acceleration of utopian expectations in our post-Enlightenment world. Repeated frustrations are no more likely to end the search than the fear of venereal disease is likely to result in universal asceticism.

It is interesting to see the part that drugs played in Aldous Huxley's thinking about the possibilities of utopia, particularly since much of the last part of his life was spent in a Hollywood environment. Drugs get a bad press in the 1932 *Brave New World*, in which the drug "soma" is a dehumanizing means of control, as well as in the 1934 *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, in which the randy 17th-century Fifth Earl of Gonnister and his mistress have managed to cheat time for two centuries by eating carpgut, a drug equivalent. Up to this point, as one might expect from the author of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), Huxley is on the side of Kafka and the classical pre-psychedelic mystics.

But with the 1954 *The Doors of Perception* (had the southern California *épistème* finally got to him?), Huxley's first experience with mescaline revealed to him that things as they are, as "Adam had seen them on the morning of his creation," are hidden from us by the eliminative censorship exercised by brain, nervous system, and sense organs. Then in 1952 came *Island* with its depiction of Pala, an ideal commonwealth in which a crucial element is the nonaddictive *moksha*-medicine made of toadstools—"the reality revealer, the truth-and-beauty pill" that makes possible "boundless compassion, fathomless mystery and meaning"

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and at the same time prevents the development of undesirable social traits.

Given his interest in ESP, hypnosis, acupuncture, mysticism, and his suspicion of the general direction of secular technological society, the value Huxley placed on drug-induced psychedelic experience may seem inevitable. His own experiments with drugs were few enough—mescaline twice and LSD three or four times, as he wrote to Thomas Merton in 1959. Nevertheless, *The Doors of Perception* gave great comfort to many other experimenters, became, in fact, a sacred text for those who needed to believe that if they had the courage to transgress the conventional censors of human perception, they might ascend to the mystic stratosphere of Meister Eckhart and St. John of the Cross as quickly as Chuck Yeager went through the sound barrier.

Huxley, like the denizens of his Pala, was a user, not an abuser, of drugs. The distinction is a comfortable one, since it classifies drugs with women and children as fundamentally precious things that ought to be protected from abuse in the expectation that, by opening the gates of Paradise, the drug will ultimately invalidate Kafka's paradox. But in the context of a drug-abusing society, the distinction turns out to be propaganda for Pala-seeking drug-users who before they know it are drug-abusers. Indeed, even those writers who, like De Quincey, Baudelaire, and Burroughs, have reported the horrors of the artificial paradise, can turn out to be propagandists—just as role-modeling actors and actresses can turn out to be propagandists for the antisocial or extralegal conduct they dramatize, even when the propaganda is against the grain of the movies in which they appear.

If we consider De Quincey's *Confessions* simply as a warning about dangerous practices, then his problem is that of any writer with great gifts of language who writes true confession: how to keep from making an experience with an admitted evil so attractive that he turns out to be in complicity with it. With popular true confession, the result most of the time is the palpable hypocrisy of those pornographic films that supply a moralistic framework as sop for the consciences of the naive and *frisson* for the more sophisticated. Obviously, this is a problem for any writer who does not write exclusively about angels, who (because they fail to get into the right kind of trouble) are in any event poor story material. Great works of literature, involved as they are with the human experience of evil, are as abusable as drugs. Nevertheless, they have a capacity to prove their moral integrity throughout the vicissitudes of interpretation. Few capable readers will take Dante's *Inferno* as propaganda for hell, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as propaganda for regicide, or St. Augustine's *Confessions* as propaganda for a Manichaean world view.

Naked Lunch, which Burroughs was writing when Huxley was writing *Island*, might appear to be anything but advocacy for drug abuse, sandwiched as it is in the popular Grove edition between prefatory and concluding anti-drug statements. Much was made of this fact by the writers who defended the book in the famous 1965 trial in Boston. They had no difficulty finding redeeming social value in its trenchant political satire, indictment of the evils of contemporary civilization, and metaphoric attack on addiction of all kinds. Indeed, here as in the earlier cases involving D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, and Ginsberg's *Howl*, the defenders seemed to agree with Jeremy Collier that the end of all the arts is the public good, however apparent it was that for some of them the issue was less the literary value of the book than the threat of censorship—here directed once more against the liberating coalition of drugs and pornography.

Norman Mailer stated in the Boston trial that Burroughs was "possibly . . . the most talented writer in America." More significantly, however, he also said that Burroughs might have been "one of the greatest geniuses of the English language if he had not been an addict." The problem here is that the addiction to junk did for *Naked Lunch* what laudanum did for De Quincey and Coleridge and what mescaline did for Huxley: it opened the doors of perception that made the book possible and at the same time publicized a myth about the relationship between drugs and the creative imagination conceived as a force radically and irresistibly hostile to all censorship. That Coleridge the laudanum addict did not conceive of the imagination in such terms did not keep the myth from being well-watered in romantic soil. Burroughs himself is taking refuge in that myth when he says in his introduction, "I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*." He is simply the sensitive reed whom supernal powers had chosen as agency.

In his 1934 *The Milk of Paradise*, M.H. Abrams writes: "The important fact is that these four authors [Crabbe, De Quincey, Coleridge, and Francis Thompson] did an incredible thing: they opened to poetry an entirely new world." Abrams' updating preface for the popular 1970 edition of this essay puts this sentence in a modifying context, but it still calls our attention, especially with that "incredible," to our romantic expectation that the true artist will open to us new worlds of intense and novel personal experience—an act so important that he must be permitted extreme if sometimes self-destroying means. This makes art a risky, even martyrdom-courting business: the artist must be willing to look over the dizzying edge, descend into the horrifying depths, open forbidden doors and go through them in violation of ancient taboos. As Mailer puts it with Burroughs in mind (and perhaps himself as well), the artist must be one "who can come back from hell with a portrait of its dimensions." Such an artist tests society also, for only "a brave and honest society . . . can look into the abyss described in *Naked Lunch*."

Indeed, the work of such an intrepid hero of experience is expected to be just as salvational and therapeutic as Antonin Artaud expected his theater of cruelty to be. In *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud, himself a drug-user, wants "to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer's subjects," to make them the subjects of a surrounding and overwhelming action in a theater that "far from copying life, puts itself wherever possible in communication with pure forces." The very language suggests an analogy between possession by art and possession by drugs, and it suggests too the extent to which motion pictures, as well as much of the world of rock music, have become a captivating theater of cruelty. And when Artaud adds that "there is a risk involved, but in the present circumstances I believe it is a risk worth running," he is only assuming a by-now conventional

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definition of art as a high-risk enterprise whose natural enemy is the risk-wary censor.

At the Boston trial even some of Burrough's defenders had to concede that his novel was structurally deficient, the concession having to be understood with reference to traditional expectations of formal clarity. So far as the artist is the intrepid hero of experience, this is an easily forgiven defect and may, in fact, be a sign of authenticity, as it is for many who admire the fiction of Dreiser and Kerouac, the films of John Cassavetes, or the music of John Cage—and who perhaps remember fondly the incoherence of underground newspapers. It is possible to concede that Ginsberg's poetry has little literary value, as Bruce Bawer has observed in *The New Criterion*, and yet place great value on it as a courageous and messianic experience. Huxley, most likely, would not have enjoyed Ginsberg's poetry, yet he helps to explain why others do enjoy it. "What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline," he writes in *The Doors of Perception*, "the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time." From this the susceptible reader easily concludes that mescaline (or LSD or cocaine or marijuana) raises one to the artist's level, which is the "structurally deficient" level of the experience of a drug.

Such a conclusion is comfortably self-validating. The more incoherent the experience is—according to a theory of imagination that assumes the creative cooperation of the conscious intellect—the more authentic that experience is likely to be, with the possible implication that the most authentic experiences of all happen outside the prison of language and are therefore unutterable. Rationality thus becomes associated with the dehumanization of society, as it did for Artaud. If, as Bawer contends, Ginsberg "is largely responsible for making drug-use fashionable among the country's educated young," he has only shown them that the true poetic frontiers of experience are instantly available to those stoned cowboys who have the courage to put their bourgeois settlements behind them. The act itself elevates them into the artist class.

In this perspective the quintessential bourgeois act is censorship, the opposite of which is generally believed to be the absolutely untrammeled flow of information. But if we think of censorship as the conditioning of information for control, it is possible to see that the opposite of censorship is no information whatever. For all forms of life, information depends on selection, which involves rejection, from the buzzing confusion of available sense data. This means that the human inhabitants of complex systems depend on the selections and rejections of censorship to identify themselves and survive, if only as specialists or fanatics. It also means that the relationshp between information and the rejection of sense data is as paradoxical as the relation between remembering and forgetting: in order to remember what promises to be meaningful, one must forget a great deal—that is, censor it out of memory. Whether the consequence is personal growth or co-optation by others who have the power to determine the way we condition information depends not only on genetic good luck but on the kind of society in which we live.

Huxley is right when he speaks of the human brain and nervous system as functioning like a censor that decides which doors of perception should be open and which closed. But he is simply being fanciful when he says that mescaline makes it possible to see things as they are, as Adam saw them on the first day of creation. Surely, whatever Adam saw was conditioned by the censoring nature of his powers of perception, however pristine they were. He saw something, which means that he did not see something else; for instance, he did not see what the lions and elephants saw, and surely the information available through their censoring systems was then as now part of the way things are. He was still Adam, not God, who, we must assume, has no need of censorship to organize the buzzing confusion, and who (perhaps it is a definition of Deity) does not have to forget anything in order to remember everything. To assume that the view through the door opened by mescaline is the ultimate view, the standard according to which the perception through other doors can be measured, is to take the experience of the drug at its own evaluation and therefore beyond undesirable tradeoff. It is the utopian assumption that helps to make human beings so addiction-prone and Kafka's paradox so offensive.

If we lived in the kind of utopian societies imagined by such bourgeois-baiters as Marx and Rousseau, the conditioning of information would be so effective that we would not be aware of it at all. Rousseau, in fact, was so certain that information in the good society had to be carefully conditioned by its supervisors that he rejected his friend d'Alembert's proposal for a dramatic theater in Geneva (it would undermine "the simple and modest virtues that make good citizens") and advised a policy of public watchfulness for Poland (things should be so arranged "that every citizen will feel himself to be constantly under the public eye"). The results would be censorship objectively speaking, but it would be in the interest of control by public virtue, as was the case in Robespierre's Republic of Virtue. The good society uses censorship to protect itself from the psychological experience of censorship. The defining burden of democracy, on the other hand, is its unremitting nervousness about censorship, and its defining weakness is its susceptibility to the promises of that artificial paradise, the totalitarian state, in which censorship, thanks to the opium of ideology, has ceased to be a problem.

The drug experience too protects its reputation as an opposer of censorship by closing the doors—in totalitarian fashion—through which information hostile to its promises might come. It protects itself also by passing itself off as a true nonbourgeois communal experience in which the deracinated and lonely modern ego is put in touch with higher unities and made whole again—the consequence Artaud expected from his theater of cruelty no less than from the peyote rituals he once experienced in Mexico. The drug ecstasy, according to its advocates, makes it possible to achieve transcendence without alienation. An ecstasy without its substantial side-effects is the quality Huxley attributed to his *moksha*-medicine and Shakespeare's Caliban to wine, the "celestial liquor" that in *The Tempest* opens to him the dealienating doors of perception wide enough to let him see two drunken sailors as gods. And the protective censorship of the drug experience is made easier in a society willing to believe in the absoluteness of the disjunction between conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational, nature and nurture, bourgeois and artist.

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midnight, call your sister/brother a jerk, or get a tattoo, even if Jennifer-Jason-Amy-Josh has been granted such privileges since birth, even if your teacher says it's okay, even if you want to trade me in for a better model—and by the way, I wouldn't trade *you* for the world. It is the willingness to be, from time to time, very unpopular with those you love the most *because* you love them the most.

Later still, it's trying to explain, at the same time, the connection between love and sex and the difference between love and sex. It's teaching that effort is sometimes its own reward (a tough one, but it connects up later with duty-as-its-own reward). It is trying to encourage without nagging, nag without bullying. It's taking your opportunities where you find them by listening when you feel like talking and talking when you feel like going to bed. It is getting Off and On—off yourself and on the job—time and again, so that somewhere down the line your children will know, among other things, who to be for their own children.

We are not talking here about the popular concepts of "quality time" and "shared experiences" (although it *is* quality time, and they *are* shared experiences). We're not talking about parenthood in the trenches. It is not, by any means, where all of parenthood takes place; but it's where some of it *must* take place.

Not for the Dad of the 80's, however. His idea of trench work is changing diapers, a job which, because *his* father refused to do it, automatically qualifies him for the Unthreatened Masculinity award. Yesterday's relentless self-explorers became today's enlightened fathers when and because they realized that as enlightened fathers they could remain relentless self-explorers—and appear responsible-yet-sensitive in the bargain. Jackpot. And where do their children fit in? Well, they get to be little sidekicks on dad's wondrous journey of self-discovery. *Look! Over here! I'm feeling good about myself!*

Past the surface, it's not at all funny, of course. The notion that children can be used to help their parents grow up is perverse and offensive and dangerous. But you wouldn't know it by Today's Dad. He's found himself an Image; he's found himself a Role. He's proud as punch and bursting to talk. Me, I'm damned if I'll listen.

REVISIONS

Boy Genius

William James Sidis learned Latin at age three. By the time he was six, he had written an extended study of anatomy and spoke seven languages. Enrolled in Harvard in 1909 at the age of 11, and within a year lecturing the senior mathematics faculty on the subtleties of fourth-dimensional bodies, "Billy" Sidis seemed bound for great things. But if Sidis had an appointment with destiny, he missed it. The depressing record of his later life is one of a $20-a-week clerk operating an adding machine, reading detective novels, and carrying on private studies in the lore of American Indians.

Amy Wallace tells the strange story of this unfulfilled genius in *The Prodigy: A Biography of William James Sidis, America's Greatest Child Prodigy* (New York: E.P. Dutton; $18.95). It makes for fascinating reading, which is more than can be said for *Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People*, which Amy coauthored with her father, Irving Wallace.

Besides providing an engaging narrative of her subject's life, Wallace tries to explain why Sidis' talents never found fruitful expression. As a teetotaler, he did not have the excuse of his friend Nathan Sharfman, who was acclaimed by Alfred North Whitehead as "the hope of American philosophy," before he took to drink and became a cabdriver. Nor did Sidis ever "burn out" or suffer a mental breakdown, as James Thurber alleged in a shamelessly cruel depiction of Sidis

in 1938. To the end of his life, Sidis could perform the most complex mathematical derivations in his head. The most reasonable motive Wallace can find for his spectacular under-achievement comes, instead, out of the "painful emotional environment" created by the degeneration of his parents' marriage, the relentless domination of his mother, and the failure of his parents to shield him from the relentless media exposure and the merciless envy of the public.

Wallace produces a fair amount of evidence to support her thesis, but in addition she unintentionally suggests another reason for Sidis' failure. Sidis' parents, both brilliant Jewish émigrés from Russia, spared neither pain nor expense in introducing their son to philosophy, literature, mathematics, and the arts, but they positively turned him away from religion: "By the age of six, Billy was a confirmed atheist." The family atheism was not so much a metaphysical problem as an obstacle to a sense of community identity. Neither Jew nor Gentile, Sidis was simply alone. It is possible to see an awkward groping toward both faith and community in the utopian movements he joined after World War I and in his research into American tribal rituals later in life.

Ambitious parents had better take a hard look at the case of Billy Sidis. A four-year-old who learns how to read and how to manipulate a Möbius strip may end up in a seedy New York apartment collecting bus transfers and studying the war chants of savages.

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The Uses of Diversity: Recovering the Recent Past

(continued from page 9)

W.B. Yeats, Allen Tate, Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy. It is more than a little ironic. This was the era foretold (accurately, for the most part) in which Western man was supposed to discover that his God was dead. The ancients faced a similar shock in late antiquity. Plutarch, in his essay on the decay of oracles, tells of the mysterious proclamation that the great god Pan was dead. Mrs. Browning, for all her occasional silliness, knew the tale had a modern ring:

> And that dismal cry rose slowly
> And sank slowly through the air,
> Full of spirit's melancholy
> And eternity's despair!
> And they heard the words it said—
> "Pan is dead—great Pan is dead—
> Pan, Pan is dead!"

And yet it was precisely then, at the collapse of paganism, that men in large numbers began to reject the poetic stories and pretty statues and looked deeper and higher for the kingdom of heaven. The moderns have also been tried as by fire and not all have been found wanting.

Most of modernism's spiritual rebels have been recognized as in some way reactionary. Eliot and Russell Kirk have seen the conservative side of Baudelaire, and George Panichas has devoted his best efforts to exploring Dostoevsky. But there are other modern writers, apparently less spiritual, whose works can be seen as part of a struggle against the principalities and powers of the age. Southerners will think immediately of Faulkner, but there are other less obvious cases—Kafka and Proust for example, two of the founding fathers of modern fiction.

Kafka, it will be said, was a neurotic, and Proust not only neurotic but homosexual. Do not look for Sophocles or Ben Jonson in an age of decadence. It has been increasingly difficult for powerful imaginations to deal with the realities of modern life. If Kafka, Proust, or Oscar Wilde were sick, their sufferings were common to the age. What is important is their search for wellness. In Kafka's case, he created a powerful tool for rebelling against the absurd and horrifying conditions of life in a total state. His repellent little fables—I think especially of "The Penal Colony"—go straight to the heart of the matter: the despair that leads decent men to construct a society which compels others to be virtuous. Eastern Europeans have been mining gold from this vein ever since. Most recently, the eerie tales of Négovan Rajic, a Francophone Yugoslav turned Canadian, bear witness to the continued vitality of the Kafkan tradition.

In point of fact, Kafka had little to complain about. Life in Prague at the end of the Hapsburg empire was, by all accounts, uncommonly pleasant, and when he read his grisly tales to friends in cafés, they laughed aloud. And yet, Kafka's special quality, as his biographer Ernst Pawel observes, is not foresight but insight, insight into a human condition that has become increasingly doubtful as the century passes.

If Kafka was a harbinger, Proust devoted his life to looking back. His long novel, the only major accomplishment of his life, can be read as a sentimental celebration of the old order in France. An ardent Dreyfusard, Proust was also an avid reader of *Action Française*, partly because he appreciated Charles Maurras' prose; partly because he was an old friend of the Daudet family (Leon Daudet served as coeditor); and partly—in all probability—because he shared with the Maurrasians a sense of regret for the decay of old France. Even Proust's bizarre metaphysics of time are part of his reactionary temper, because it is in life as it is lived and in history that we find meaning—not in the august platitudes of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The search for meaning has been largely a private and individual affair, so much so that artists have seemed to cut themselves off from the world outside themselves. Painters increasingly turned away from portraits and natural landscapes to mental interiors; composers—especially the serialists and other atonal experimenters—came to reject harmonics based on the overtone series and rooted in human perception and devised ideal systems for abstract listeners. The most serious change came in the most universal arts—poetry, novels, and drama. Rhyme and (worse) rhythm were sloughed off in favor of verse forms that are so free that no one will pay money for them or rhythmical techniques so intricate that no one can hear them. The heart of all verse, however, is the alternation of only two qualities—whether they are the classical long/short or the Germanic stressed/unstressed. Rhythmic alternation is the systole-diastole, the heartbeat of poetry. It takes more than a circulatory system to keep an organism alive (a brain helps for some of us, although Keats managed to do reasonably well without it), but it is essential. Arhythmical poetry has all the forcefulness and vitality of cardiac arrest.

If poets have given up rhyme, they—like practitioners of the novel—have also turned their backs on reason, in particular that reason which is used in reconstructing the world through narrative. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle put *mythos*, story-telling, at the center of poetry. He was thinking primarily of epic and drama, but the judgment applies to all true literature. In telling a story, we are forced to make sense of the formless flow of everyday occurrences. One event must lead to another, characters must display enough consistency to make their actions intelligible and congruent. As Alasdair MacIntyre has expressed it more recently, "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth." The rejection of plot and narrative in fiction reflects a more generalized despair of the world. The modern novelist is telling us, no less than the painter and composer of music, that there is no point in even trying to make sense of things.

But it is too easy to excoriate the writers and artists of the past 150 years for giving up on the world. In a sense, the world abandoned them first. The history of English verse from Wordsworth to Eliot constitutes a series of responses to a civilization that was destroying the artists' natural habitat.

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In the face of industrialization and the enlightened self-interest preached by *philosophes*, utilitarians, and liberal capitalists, the Romantic poets sought refuge in the landscapes of nature and the human heart. They discovered the quaintness of common people—Wordsworth in his ballads, Scott in his antiquarian Scottish novels, and a whole movement of English and European writers who celebrated the Folk.

As the century wore on, urbanization, specialization, and market forces pushed back the natural frontiers. Burke's sophisters and economists were organizing Britain, France, and Bismarckian Germany into bureaucratic states. Poets withdrew even further into themselves and took refuge on Parnassus with Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin. The ultimate flight was the Wagnerian delusion—shared by Mallarmé and the symbolists—that poetry itself could redeem the world. Wagner's *Ring* and *Parsifal* and Mallarmé's impossible *Livre* were only the most grandiose efforts to cast a spell that would save Europe from itself.

The saddest chapter was written by the English decadents—Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, Oscar Wilde, and (for a time) Yeats. Each one of them was talented and dedicated to his craft, but all of them (except Yeats) succeeded in destroying themselves, willfully, perversely, pathetically: Dowson with drink and prostitutes he compared to Mrs. Browning, Wilde with overeating and vicious homosexual lovers, and Johnson (Lionel) "by falling from a high stool in a pub," as Ezra Pound described it. Pound, of all people, got it *all* right in his "Mauberly"—the decadents, the philistines, "the dead art of poetry," the war (First World):

> There died a myriad,
> And of the best, among them,
> For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
> For a botched civilization . . .
> For two gross of broken statues,
> For a few thousand battered books.

Great literature (and Pound's "Mauberly" *is* a great poem, unlike the *Cantos*) is always reactionary. Not sometimes or often but always, without exception because, whatever else they do, the most serious writers force us to measure ourselves and our accomplishments by standards higher than what, to borrow again from Pound, "the age demanded." The sources for those standards are limited; they derive from those occasional moments or decades, centuries even, when the transcendent seems to have broken into the everyday—like streams of sunlight through the sooty rafters of an old cabin. "The custom of the greater ones" is a literally inaccurate translation of the Latin phrase for tradition (*mos maiorum*), but it gets the point across. There were giants once, and a mature artist will strive to match their best work.

Progress, as every artist knows, is nothing more than the price we pay for our failure. It may be necessary, even desirable, but it is an indication of our inability to sustain the burden of the past. We have to grow and change (or else we should not be alive), but better men would not so quickly squander their inheritance. Progressive art is the product of children and the feebleminded, the dull and selfish primitives who think theirs is the best of all possible worlds to live in. If the primitives wear silk or own a computer, it makes no difference. Anyone who celebrates tomorrow as the dawn of Utopia (one thinks immediately of the futurists) is a hopeless savage who has nothing to tell us, unless we really need to be congratulated for being "not like other men."

What the best of modern art teaches us, especially the poets, is what we most need to hear. It is a message as simple as Dirty Harry's "A man's got to know his limitations." Baudelaire, Pound (at his best), Eliot, Yeats, Frost, and Jeffers all teach us at least that much, and if we can learn nothing more by wrestling with their puzzling, sometimes grotesque productions, we shall not have wasted our time.

—*Thomas Fleming*

REVISIONS

The Lonely American

The frontier has shaped the American identity from the very beginning. Puritans preached against the wilderness as the devil's chosen land and the Indians as a race of Satanists. Such diverse spirits as Frederick Jackson Turner and John Crowe Ransom saw the frontier individualism as the defining force of our history. Unlike Ransom, Turner recognized, to some extent, the migration of community life towards the West—an insight developed into an intelligent essay by Robert V. Hine in *Community on the American Frontier: Separate but Not Alone* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press), now back in print.

Hine has patched together a set of memoirs, diaries, and narratives into a sociological quilt whose pattern was laid out by Robert Nisbet. In mining camps, on the trail, in farmhouses, the frontier settlers constantly made efforts to escape their Hobbesian anarchy and reconstruct some semblance of community. Without women and children, it never seemed to work, and even saddled with dependents, Western men were often too self-seeking to maintain the bonds of communal life: *Shane*, *Pale Rider*, and *Josey Wales* are not far from reality. Admirers of Mr. Eastwood will remember that in the end, Josey Wales "the outlaw" finds a new family and communal life to replace what the war had destroyed. It is this quest for community, to borrow Nisbet's phrase, which defines the frontier experience and continues to outline the contours of life in suburban America.

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Faces of Clio *by Robert Nisbet*

"The obscurest epoch is today."
—Robert Louis Stevenson

The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History, edited by Stephen Vaughn, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press; $12.95.

Britain and the Weimar Republic by F.L. Carsten, New York: Schocken Books; $20.00.

The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955 by John Colville, New York and London: W.W. Norton; $25.00.

Taken together, these three books serve nicely as a kind of group portrait of Clio and her several faces. In reverse order we have the historian as diarist and memoirist, as documentarian, and as reflective sage. As one of the learned species, historians, it has always seemed to me, lead all the rest in the amount of public preening they do, in volume and regularity of assurances to the citizenry of the indispensability of their guild in the making of the informed citizen.

There is something to their self-promotion. Burke taught a natural-rights-drenched Europe that it is the historical world alone that counts, natural rights, so called, being as aerated as, say, phlogiston. But Burke didn't feel it necessary to write narrative histories to prove his point, and I submit that a deeper and more tenacious sense of the past and its unending vitality can come from the nonnarrative, non-episodic treatment of some aspect of the *present* than from the formally declared "history." Works by Maine, Vinogradov, Hayek, and Schumpeter come quickly to mind in this respect, but there are many more, by philosophers, theologians, and statesmen, even occasional social scientists to make the point.

So much of current history-writing has the secondhandedness that comes from confronting not a historical phenomenon itself in the first instance, but rather a predecessor's or even contemporary's treatment of that phenomenon. But, then, revisionism has always been a marked attribute of the professional historian's contemplations. Thucydides chided Herodotus for his gullibility, as did Polybius Timaeus, and Lucian Ctesias. From the time in the 6th century B.C. when Hecataeus dealt critically with the myths and legends extant, striving to rescue the "true" from the "false," down through all the intervening ages to Ranke and his stern *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, to the latest revisionist of a revisionist of the Old South, tilting at forebears has been a very structural element of history writing. This has led some serious people to ask, from time to time, whether history is a profession like medicine, astronomy, or sculpture or instead a club within which members play, with solemn mien, their games.

The relation between the words *history* and *story* is not limited to etymology. Both have long had the common spine of the narrative: "First this, and then, and then . . . " Tell me a story, begs the child; write me a history demands the publisher—or department chairman gazing sternly at a young colleague's prospects for promotion. Much social science stems from the metaphor of growth, organic growth being the model; hence its fondness for portrayals of reality in which little baby changes grow up into larger changes and then stride across the landscape. Historians are not averse to this, but their larger contribution ever since "'Omer smote' is bloomin' lyre" has been that of marrying eligible events to one another and then recording the alleged issue of the marriages.

The narrative framework is as much the rock of history writing as it is of literature. There is the occasional historian who declares himself scientific by comparison with, say, a Zoë Oldenbourg and her immensely knowledgeable novels of the Middle Ages; but he is not using the word "scientific" in any way that the sciences would find acceptable. Coulton's Middle Ages are as much the product of art as Oldenbourg's. It was a school of historians, not novelists, that Trevelyan mocked when he wrote: "Men of the Middle Ages; you are about to begin the Hundred Years War." Ranke's famous adjuration to tell it exactly as it happened may have been addressed to those charmed by Walter Scott's novels, but it is far more likely, I think, that it was directed to self-styled historians of his day, particularly the writers of *histoire raisonnée*.

Vaughn's anthology of 35 historians, some departed, most still living, has some excellent and stylistically iridescent testaments to the value of history and to the pitfalls in its construction by historians. It is good to reread Carl Becker's notable "Everyman His Own Historian" in which he reminds us that ultimately the art of history, academic or other, stands or falls by its skill in arresting the attention of Everyman. The same exactly was true of ancient bards who told sad stories of the great and powerful. Verisimilitude is quite as important to the novelist or epic poet as it is to the

Robert Nisbet was the 1985 recipient of the Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters and is the author more recently of Conservatism: Dream and Reality *(University of Minnesota Press).*

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historian. It was as historian, philosopher, and artist that Carl Becker gave us his great *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (on which Peter Gay did not so much as lay a glove in his tirade); add to that also wit—precisely the kind of wit that we find in Gibbon.

Bless Professor Vaughn for including Herbert Butterfield's "The Dangers of History." "The dangers of history are liable to become much greater if we imagine that the study of this subject qualifies us to be politicians or provides us with patterns which we can immediately transpose into the context of contemporary politics." Butterfield goes on to say that history is made the more dangerous by the fateful affinity that seems to lie between it and the Machiavellis, Napoleons, and Lenins of the world. He adds, "One of the dangers of history lies in the ease with which these apparently self-evident judgments can be extracted from it, provided one closes one's eyes to certain facts. The person who is incapable of seeing more than one thing at once . . . will reach results all the more quickly and will feel the most assured in the judgments that he makes."

Bacon's Idols of the Theatre and the Marketplace are found as often and lushly in the minds of historians—who might be presumed to have a few more defenses against them—as of plumbers and taxi drivers. Consider the whole ridiculous story of the so-called Renaissance in Europe, that of the fabled Quattrocento in Italy, believed even to this day by many to be the supreme eruption in world history of genius in philosophy and science and technology as well as painting. The myth of such an age began with the players themselves, the humanists, so-called, in the Italian 15th century. They, in their hatred of feudalism and contempt for church and monastery, declared that *they*, by virtue of their alleged revival of the ancient classics of Greece and Rome, had liberated Europe's mind from the clutch of ecclesiastical tyranny and launched it into a future of unparalleled magnificence. So sown, the myth prospered, believed in raptly by most of the *philosophes* in the 18th century and transmitted to Michelet, whose hatred of the Church knew no limits. It was Burckhardt, though, who most successfully hypnotized the modern mind with his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, a book that in paper remains a best-seller, an achievement made ironic by Burckhardt's personal hatred and contempt for the humanists and all their coffeehouse descendants through the centuries following, including the *philosophes* and the rootless intellectuals of Burckhardt's own day in Europe.

As I say, even at the present moment, despite the relentless exposures, from Pierre Duhem on, of the falsity of the claim of a renascence in the 15th century that ushered in modern science and philosophy and laid the base of modernity, even a few historians, and vast numbers of laymen remain convinced that *something* at least happened in that century; enough surely to justify giving a course on the subject in college and a chapter on it in school textbooks. As a pessimist, I am certain that we shall never be let free of that laugher "Renaissance mind" whenever someone of reputed breadth of knowledge seduces the newspaper mind. May I say here, before concluding on the subject, that I too am, and will forever be, charmed, enchanted, and narcotized by Florence and Venice.

F.L. Carsten reveals another face of Clio: that of assiduous regard for the documents. No one can take away from historians—beginning in the last century—a passion for documents and their contents that serves admirably to fortify us against some of the more outrageous myths which—like that of the Italian Renaissance—go on and on until finally demolished by some serious scholar. I doubt that historians would relish the comparison, but at their best they serve a journalist's role in their examination of rumors, reports, and alleged miracles.

Both journalists and historians work from the documents of the case; that is, when they are alert to responsibility. It is the foremost task of each to tell the world, when necessary, that the emperor in fact has no clothes on. From journalists as well as historians come periodically the deadly missiles which bring down for good some of the entelechies and spongy abstractions which are Christianity's revenge for the rationalists' assault upon the divine.

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A rousing romp with the documents has succeeded in banishing many a philosopher's or social scientist's —and historian's —delusion of "irrepressible conflict," "inevitable rise (or fall)," "overpowering trend," and "inexorable movement." Historians are often as prone as novelists to ascribe motives to the principals of history when they don't know any more about such motives than they do their next-door neighbor's. A sudden windfall of documents often helps banish the worst of claimed motives. Then there is our love, in history and in fiction, of great—if dubious—unities of personages and events. I believe firmly that if there is a 21st century, and there are still historians writing, a best-seller will come off the press with the engaging title *Stalin, Hitler, and Churchill: A Study in Twentieth Century Unity.* There are as bad if not worse titles to be found even now in the library catalogs.

Another idol of the historian's and journalist's mind is "crisis." We must be forever indebted to Elizabeth Eisenstein for her discovery that every single century from at least the 12th in European history all the way down to the 20th has been labeled, in title as well as theme, "Century of Crisis." Nor must I forget "innocence." Breathes there the century or half-century or decade that hasn't been characterized an "Age of Innocence"? From which, naturally, there was a Fall. In the end, only the documents help save us from lasting refuge in these secularizations of the biblical.

Professor Carsten, of the University of London, gives us in his illuminating treatment of the Weimar Republic and its relation to the West an important distillation of his explorations of documents of both the Foreign and the War Offices in Britain. As he points out, British officers and officials had a unique excellence of observational position with respect to Germany during the years immediately following the surrender of November 1918. "Owing to the occupation of the Rhineland and the several Allied Commissions working in Germany—partly military, partly supervising the various plebiscites—British officers and officials were in an almost unique position to observe the German scene. . . . In addition some German ministers, above all Streseman, were in the habit of talking confidentially to British diplomats in Germany, of unburdening their hearts and expressing their secret worries to them."

What we gain from Professor Carsten's immersion in the files is a crisply written, spare, and no-nonsense treatment of the history of the Weimar Republic as seen through the eyes of some of the top British officials of the 1920's, one and all present on the scene and alert to what was happening. From the opening chapter, "Defeat and Revolution in Germany," through "Bavaria and the Hitler Putsch," "The Great Crisis of 1923," and "The Final Crisis," down to the final chapter, "The National Socialist Takeover," we are treated to a narrative account of that ill-fated government that is close to exemplary, it seems to me. The spread of the poisons of German anti-Semitism within Weimar together with frank accounts of the conditions within which the poisons gained their greatest potency and of the reactions of all classes of non-Jewish Germans, all this is found in impressive detail in the varied reports of Britons on the scene to their home offices. On the whole, while England slept (if indeed it did sleep during a full decade of turmoil, strife, and breakdown of its own) the diplomatic corps did a respectable job.

"Faced by the rise of the National Socialist movement, some of the Foreign Office officials took too rosy a view of its 'youthfulness,' its 'vigor,' and its 'sincerity,' and praised its determination to restore 'discipline' in German youth. . . . Yet these illusions did not last, and the diplomatic reports on the 'seizure of power' were completely realistic and made no effort to conceal or condone the terror unleashed in Germany." It is also true, as Carsten shows beyond question, that at least some of the Foreign Office people in Germany showed a rooted anti-Semitism of their own, a state of mind that largely accounted for some exaggerated or distorted accounts of Jewish influence in Germany. But these, we find, are the exceptions. For the most part the multitude of documents examined by Professor Carsten reveal laudable perceptiveness and objectivity.

From Carsten's account, we are justified, I think, in rejecting for once and all the recurrent charges that the British official mind, that particularly of the Foreign Office, was seized by defeatism and appeasement prior to Churchill's ascendancy to the Prime Ministership in mid-1940. Chamberlain made one, and one only, serious mistake at Munich in 1938: that was his egregious phrase "peace with honor" when he returned to Britain. But aversion of war with Germany was an absolute necessity for Britain. It had a great navy but nothing else, least of all anything resembling an air force. Hitler would not have been deceived on that score, sitting as he was on top of the greatest air force in the world in that year. Happily for mankind, a great deal got done in Britain, and much more started, in the short period between Munich and September 1939 when Nazi forces invaded Poland.

John Colville's *The Fringes of Power* is, I have to say, somewhat disappointing as a World War II diary. It can't compete either in importance or sheer interest with the diaries kept by Field Marshall Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff for Great Britain through most of the war; by Lord Moran, personal, Parliament-imposed physician to Churchill throughout; or even the diary kept by Harry Butcher, special aid and constant companion of Eisenhower. My strong interest in Colville's work was aroused last September, before the diaries' publication, by an article he wrote in *Commentary*. The subject was essentially how we won the war against Nazism but lost the peace in 1945 through wartime mistakes by America and Great Britain in their relation to the Soviet Union.

Colville does not by any means exculpate Churchill and Britain, but he quite correctly lays the larger share of blame upon Roosevelt and some of those closest to him, both civil and military. From the beginning, as Colville notes (in line with the bulk of historical assessments written since 1945) a haze of romantic populism interfered with a clear-eyed view of Stalin and the Soviets. In the minds of the American principals, starting with FDR, the British Empire was a greater danger to postwar peace and tranquillity than the Soviet Union and the sovietized dictatorships it began form-

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a continuity between nature and the human spirit, which the poets located in a common origin in infinity. Was not nature infinite? And was not the spirit that rose to meet it also infinite? Were man and nature not two indissoluble—and at happy moments, indistinguishable—parts of a single entity? To call the Romantic poet egocentric in a pejorative sense is rather like trying to insult a carpenter by calling him tool-oriented. The ego was the poet's tool, an instrument used for sympathetic identification.

In *Seas and Inland Journeys* Applewhite underscores the differences between Derrida and Wordsworth by means of similes contained in the works of both: "Derrida's model of the relation of the writer's mind to nature is masturbational: the writer never actually possesses the thing desired, but accepts words instead, whose role is to substitute for, to defer. Wordsworth proposed a different sexual metaphor for the imagination's relation to reality. He called it a marriage, and looked upon both mind and nature as active (and interactive) partners."

Applewhite's sturdy contrast will not make him popular among the most fashionable critics, and it is easy to foresee the objections that will be brought against him. Derrida and his cousins are so firmly entrenched in the academic mind that his propositions are accepted as scientific fact. The critics will simply reiterate that the writer obviously cannot possess the thing desired by means of language.

Perhaps that is true, in a final sense, but it has to be equally true of every human endeavor involving nature: philosophy, art, science, and even grammatology. Language is anthropocentric, but it is less anthropocentric than any form of pure thought, whether abstract, analytic, logical or illogical, or wishful reverie. Language, in its attempt to engage with the objects of nature, first names and numbers them, and all the rest of our complex and ungainly engagement stems from these two basic operations. If they are mistaken attempts, then all the things that follow from them are sterile absurdities, including especially such concepts as mass, inertia, logic, and metalanguage.

In fact, this was just what the Romantic poets suspected, that language on its analytic side was inadequate to engage with nature in its infinite aspect. Once we begin counting, the Numberless escapes us; once we begin naming, the Nameless retreats farther from our senses. Once we pulverize our largest impression of nature, a lifeless dust is all that remains. "We murder to dissect."

The poets needed a language which could deal with infinity as infinity and not just as an enormous catalog with only a few of the pages turned. The language they found was first of all objective; it was landscape itself, certain selected scenes of nature that indicated, and partly illustrated, the infinity of the whole. Mountains, oceans, deserts, fields, skies full of weather —these exhibited the spatial infinity of nature; ruins and rural scenes exhibited the temporal infinity. By 1712, Joseph Addison had glimpsed the tendency of future endeavor: "Our Imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its Capacity." And by 1747, John Baillie was able to formulate part of the Romantic longing as clearly as it ever needed to be: "Where an Object is *vast* and at the same Time *uniform*, there is to the Imagination no Limits of its Vastness, and the Mind runs out into Infinity, continually *creating* as it were from the *Pattern*."

One matter that has always troubled the precise reader is the vagueness of the Romantic vocabulary. Words like *awesome, primordial, vast, skyey, endless*, and so forth turn up with reflexive regularity and seem to deliver a limited content or none at all. There is, of course, justice in this criticism, but we also have to recognize that every poetic movement develops a certain idiom for its subject matter and then comes to identify that idiom with the subject itself. In our time, sincerity of sentiment is the accepted subject matter of verse and its proper occasions recognized in such autobiographical situations as family difficulties, personal despair, political protest, and divorce. So that our contemporary poetry can hardly do without such words and phrases as *empty, bitter, alone, O father, this year again, you, nightmare*, and so on, and if a poet renounces these familiar rhetorical turns he must content himself with at least a temporary neglect.

And just as a contemporary poet will argue that his idiom is precise, so would a Romantic poet argue for his. A fixed idiom acquires a precision of connotation within a certain period; certain words become indicators of attitudes whose intellectual content is well-known in their generation. Then the familiar attitudes are absorbed into emotional and intellectual history, and the words begin to indicate new attitudes. Wordsworth's noun *evening* and T.S. Eliot's *evening* almost belong to two different languages, yet Eliot's usage has absorbed part of Wordsworth's and to some extent depends upon it.

Seas and Inland Journeys explores at length a single complex of Romantic imagery which portrays the individual spirit against a backdrop of infinite nature. From the works of Poe, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, Yeats and others, Applewhite selects scenes such as we would find in a picture gallery of works by Turner, Constable, Casper David Friedrich, Peter De Wint, Thomas Girtin, Joseph Wright of Derby, and even by Gainsborough. Here in the poets are the broad cloud-wild skies, the beaten and lonely towers beside the turbulent waters, the mountain crags, and the forest wastes —"Horrid with fern and intricate with thorn," as Dryden wrote. Against these enormities is set the figure of man or some evidence of the works of man, the human spirit isolate within infinity.

This landscape also connotes, Applewhite finds, the conscious rational mind reflecting upon its primeval unconscious origins. The image presented is one of contrast, the small against the vast, the mortal against the timeless. But this contrast is only part of the idea, for the two elements interpenetrate one another. "The dream of the Romantic self's approach to the not-self of nature depends upon just this obscure intuition that the self and the not-self, at some deep enough level, are coextensive and correspond."

What was it then that happened? What caused the downslide into modernist poetry? The fact, says Applewhite, that the modern poet began using the tools of analysis in his creative work and, in effect, went over to the side of the enemy. "The presence

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within the modern poet of an alien rationality, of the masculine pure reason of an Apollonius at the feast of poor Lamia . . . has provided both a dazzling clarity of analysis and expression and has threatened to initiate a potentially fatal disunity within the total personality, setting reason at odds with imagination, skepticism against the impulse toward faith, surgical self-consciousness against the impulse toward synthesis."

James Applewhite is himself a brilliant poet, and his conclusion here is so apprehensive that a reader may feel it has autobiographical as well as intellectual basis.

He chooses as example of the disunified personality Poe's deeply romantic, icily intellectual, detective Auguste Dupin. "Purely conscious Dupin has looked upon irrational ape with cold calculation. The ape, misunderstood, has responded with outrage and violence."

His proposition seems true enough, though a bit awkward. Dupin had little connection with the natural landscape. Perhaps we might remember more clearly that favorite subject of Romantic painting, the Falls at Reichenbach in the Swiss Alps. Turner's studies of it are only the most famous of a famous lot. And it was here that A. Conan Doyle sent Sherlock Holmes to his death, locked in the deadly embrace of his evil counterpart, Professor Moriarty, that obscene avatar of the primordial unconscious. Moriarty is not a very cheerful representative of the unconscious, but then we are not always at liberty to choose what the infinite may send to us.

Applewhite has demonstrated what the Romantics knew, that we had better be receptive.

When He Was Good *by Brian Murray*

"A man who writes a book, thinks himself wiser or wittier than the rest of mankind; he supposes that he can instruct or amuse them, and the public to whom he appeals must, after all, be the Judges of his pretensions."

—Samuel Johnson

Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy & Epilogue **by Philip Roth, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22.50.**

Philip Roth's first book, a collection of stories called *Goodbye Columbus*, was a critical smash. Reviewers hailed it as witty, energetic, and accurately detailed; they noted with astonishment that Roth was only 26, and they predicted a distinguished career. *Goodbye Columbus* earned Roth the National Book Award and a three-year stint as writer-in-residence at Princeton.

Goodbye Columbus appeared in 1959. Roth's next book—published three years later—was *Letting Go*, a 600-page novel that tracks the labored passage from innocence to experience of a self-absorbed and largely unpleasant academic. *Letting Go* had its admirers, but many critics agreed that it was too long and turgid, and more than a tad pretentious. Roth spent five years sweating over his next novel, *When She Was Good* (1967), which also did little to increase his readership or reputation. More than one critic noted that *When She Was Good*—the only Roth novel with an entirely non-Jewish cast—was both flat and unconvincing. Jonathan Baumbach, writing for *Commonweal*, suggested that Roth's portrayal of a family of Midwestern Protestants was "an accomplishment comparable, say, to Zero Mostel doing an extended imitation of Jimmy Stewart."

Roth's next novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, was one of the biggest sellers of 1969. It brought Roth more than $500,000 in advance royalties and paperback sales, and another $250,000 from the Hollywood producers who turned it into a widely flacked movie starring Richard Benjamin and Karen Black. For months, *Portnoy's Complaint* was a major topic of discussion on radio and television talk shows and in offices and bars throughout North America. *Everybody* read the thing, or—perhaps more commonly—thumbed through its pages in search of "the good parts."

Portnoy's Complaint dealt with subjects that—even in the startling 60's—were considered taboo. Alexander Portnoy, its 33-year-old narrator, rambles on and on about his obsessive sexual fantasies and masturbatory practices—and he spares no details. He calls his chronically constipated father a "moron" and a "schmuck"; he attacks his mother with even greater vituperation. According to Portnoy, she is the "big smothering bird" who caused his lack of confidence and his excessive fear of germs—particularly *goyische* germs; who left him "marked like a road map from head to toe with my repressions."

Praise for *Portnoy's Complaint* came from influential quarters. *Time*, for example, called it "skillfully paced" and "too funny not to be taken seriously." But its detractors probably outnumbered its defenders; indeed no novel published in the 60's was as widely and aggressively slammed. Kingsley Amis—writing in *Harper's*—suggested that *Portnoy's Complaint* was little more than "a heavily orchestrated yell of rage," and that, inevitably, "rage wears one down." In *The Hudson Review*, J. Mitchell Morse called Roth "a servile entertainer" who had thrown together "a series of burlesque skits" and "a swirl of contemporary clichés about Jews in general: Jews Have a Strong Family Life. Jewish Family Life Is Hell. Jews Are Either Extraordinarily Intelligent or Extraordinarily Stupid and Gross. Some Intelligent Jews Are Also Gross. . . . "

Scores of Jewish commentators ech-

Brian Murray is professor of English at Youngstown State University.

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Amazing Grace

by Carl C. Curtis

***This Grace Given* by David H.C. Read, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.**

In the New College at Edinburgh in 1934, young divinity students stimulated themselves by turning over old and new ideas: Calvinism, Barthianism, the role of the body of Christ in the world, the form of the liturgy, the purpose of missions—in other words, the same issues that, *mutatis mutandis*, have sparked theological discussions since the Church became flesh. At the same time that these earnest young ministers-to-be were absorbing themselves in the finer points of good Scots Presbyterian doctrine, another group of youths seeking to found a new order based on less ancient assumptions were playing lurid pranks on some of their countrymen and singing drinking songs which, however similar musically to those of their fathers, contained lyrics proclaiming a bright future in which "Jewish blood would run in the gutters." These two groups, so symbolic of the clash of ideas in the 20th century, have at least one common denominator: David H.C. Read, now pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, witnessed both. He has recorded his impressions of the surrounding events in his autobiographical *This Grace Given*.

One of the problems with contemporary religious books is that their authors frequently yield to the temptation to make inspirational mountains out of molehills. Because our communion with God involves the highest faculty of the soul, writings concerning that relationship ought to record nothing less than our sublimest thoughts and greatest wisdom. They rarely do. Show me a man who has perused more good than bad "inspirational" biographies, and I'll show you a man without discernment.

Happily, *This Grace Given* avoids the pitfalls that make unreadable so many of the equally sincere but inferior efforts of other writers. One reason is Read himself. As a man, he emerges from these pages wise, modest, and all in all delightful. It may be true that a saint cannot hope to compete with a sinner in the memoirs market (Xaviera Hollander sells better than St. Francis Xavier); yet Read is still impressive and, well, readable.

Second, Read's experiences *are* interesting. The book begins pleasantly enough with the author chronicling his Scottish ancestry and his only occasionally fitful pilgrimage towards the faith of his fathers. These are lovely chapters depicting a happier world than ours in which one senses Read would have been content to spend his days uninterrupted.

That was not to be. After his theological studies at Marburg and other European universities and a brief tenure as minister of the Kirk at Coldstream and Edinburgh, Read joined the army as a chaplain and took part in the disastrous retreat at Dunkirk. Not among the quarter of a million who escaped, he was captured on the beach near St.-Valery and spent the next five years in a series of prisoner-of-war camps.

It would be difficult to convey here the richness of Read's account of these years in confinement. Yet for me, certain incidents—some comic, others tragic, all poignant—stand out and reveal both the times and the nature of the men who lived through them. One involves an English officer who, because he contemptuously threw away a dish of baked beans served for breakfast the morning before his capture, was doomed to hungrily contemplate them for the duration—a minor crucifixion. Many passages tell of the humanity of those among the enemy who shared Read's faith. One of the most memorable is of a young German soldier laconically telling Read after his capture, "Your days are over. The Church is finished. We are in a new world." (How many times throughout the centuries have "progressives" said this?) These are events the court historians overlook or discard as trivial but which tell more about the men who make history than more notable occurrences.

What emerges most from this short, unpretentious, yet remarkably wise little book is that men stripped of everything can either surrender to despair or rise out of their anguish and boredom to discover "the unfathomable riches of Christ." That so many men, often in spite of themselves, come away from such experiences spiritually richer instead of poorer suggests something that the saints have always known: that all "new worlds" must sooner or later weaken and crumble in the face of God.

Carl C. Curtis is assistant professor of English at Liberty University.

Barroom Psychiatry

by Gary Jason

***The Myth of Neurosis* by Garth Wood, New York: Harper & Row.**

Psychotherapy is big business. America employs perhaps a half million professionals and paraprofessionals (psychotherapists, psychiatric technicians, drug/alcohol counselors, clinical social workers, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses, family therapists) in the field, and the talk therapy industry as a whole is worth about $17 billion. Yet many scholars and laymen are uneasy at the sight of the tower of psychobabble. Himself a psychiatrist and philosopher, Garth Wood has written a fascinating book, which is at once a critique of psychoanalytic therapy (and theory) and a sketch of an alternative form of therapy Wood calls "moral therapy."

To help the reader see the difference between real mental illness and phony "disorders" and "neuroses," Wood provides a detailed appendix which helps you decide whether or not you are truly psychotic. (As he notes, chances are good that if you worry about being insane, you aren't insane.) Moreover, Wood does not criticize all forms of therapy—he readily concedes that some forms of behavioral therapy are quite effective in modifying undesirable behavior. But he denies that either "talk" therapy (Freudianism and all its descendants) or drug therapy ("mind candy") are effective. His critique of those standard psychiatric therapies is both philosophic and scientific.

On the scientific side, Wood lays out the evidence against psychotherapy and

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psychoanalytic theory in detail. Wood reviews the classic theoretical criticisms of Freudian theory by Sir Karl Popper and Sir Peter Medawar. Even supporters of Freudian theory such as Adolf Grünbaum (the eminent philosopher of science) and Arnold Cooper (past president of the American Psychoanalytic Association) admit that its theoretic underpinnings are weak. A number of empirical studies have likewise shown psychoanalytic therapy to be ineffective and even harmful. One early critic, Hans Eysenck, analyzed 19 reports on the effects of psychotherapy and discovered that the patients who had no psychiatric therapy improved the most, those with "eclectic" (non-Freudian) therapy improved less, and the patients with Freudian therapy did the worst. Wood concludes bluntly that the therapeutic claims of psychotherapists no longer have scientific or moral credibility and that practitioners are shamelessly "taking money from the gullible."

Wood's criticisms ring true, especially if you have ever known someone who has been "in analysis" for years. Wood is caustic on this point:

> [Psychoanalysis] may be rubbish, but it is dangerous and demeaning rubbish, tending to rob us of our natural belief that we are in control of our mental and physical behavior, fostering the illusion of our lack of responsibility, of our passivity. As the tentacles of this pernicious doctrine reach out to embrace the arts, politics and education, nothing remains untouched by the poison of its determinism as it degrades creativity, debases ambition and reduces the value of human aspiration.

More philosophically, Wood criticizes the whole concept of neurosis. He puts forward the view, so obvious that it has escaped the masters of arcane psychiatry, that aside from clear cases of psychotic illness, much of what passes for "mental illness" is in fact not illness at all. So called "neuroses" and "personality disorders" are just pseudoscientific terms for behavior that is self-destructive, self-centered, imprudent, eccentric, noble, or evil. Thieves and murderers must not be stigmatized as "evil men" but treated as mentally ill "sociopaths."

When Wood turns from his trenchant critique of psychotherapy to propounding his own method of "moral therapy," things are less satisfactory. The goal of the moral therapist (friend or priest) is to help the other person gain self-respect. The doctor/patient relationship gives way to friendship between equals, and "therapy" can take place at the ball park or bar as well as in an office or hospital. The moral therapist helps his troubled friend grow in self-respect in three ways: (1) recognizing and living up to his own value system; (2) confronting problems squarely; (3) exercising.

The problem lies in getting past the first step, which sounds suspiciously like the "values clarification" strategy now touted by too many professors of education. Wood goes so far as to tell us that if a mentally troubled man's own ideals lead him to acts that society would regard as "terrorist," then the "individual's mental health" should take priority over "the standards and rules of society." Sending one letter bomb may indeed provide as much catharsis as several hours on the couch, but does Wood really want to replace Freud with Sorel?

Perhaps the problem is simply that Wood has spent so much time demolishing Freudianism that he hasn't worked out his own views enough. Currently at work on a new book, Wood may yet help us escape both the ersatz professionalism of the psychoanalyst and the chummy relativism of the "moral therapist."

Gary Jason is a doctoral student in computer science at the University of California—Irvine.

Sorcery in the Kremlin

by Michael Warder

The Set-Up **by Vladimir Volkoff, New York: Arbor House; $16.95.**

Some novels tell a story that causes us to see reality in a new way. Other novels are manufactured around a message. *The Set-Up* is of this second type.

Volkoff wants to teach us that the Soviets plan long term, that they are clever at masking their intentions, and that they have committed their resources to disrupting and misleading Western media and book publishing. These ideas are important, but Volkoff paints the masters of Soviet disinformation as if they were mystics and wizards whose powers transcend Marxism-Leninism. In his story, they plan individual missions 30 years in advance and teach their disciples by parable and analogy. In fact, the architects of Soviet disinformation are mostly career bureaucrats who are shackled by ideology and the will to power and who use their agents for self-advancement. As party hacks, they teach by rote memorization and drill, and they follow routinized operating procedures rather than subtle aphorisms.

The Set-Up may give us suggestive insights into the complex feelings of an older generation of Russian émigrés and their children, who now look at the Soviet Union with a mixture of awe and fear. But those who wish to learn more about disinformation would do better to read John Barron or Roy Godson.

Michael Warder is executive vice president of The Rockford Institute.

Remembering Roswitha

by Caroline Morgan

The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, **translated by Katharina M. Wilson, Saskatoon: Matrologia Latina/Peregrina Publishing.**

Do you remember Hrotsvit (Roswitha) of Gandersheim, mentioned in the survey of world literature that you took as an undergraduate? "The first female German poet, the first dramatist of Germany, the first person in Germany to employ the Faust theme, etc."—but who cared? Because Hrotsvit, the canoness of the Imperial Abbey of Gandersheim, wrote her legends, plays, and epics in Latin, they were for many years a lost treasure for everyone except scholars.

In a labor of love, Katharina Wilson has now translated Hrotsvit's Latin dramas into rhymed, rhythmic English prose. Wilson has included a very readable introduction that summarizes the action and setting of each play. She also describes the excitement of the German humanists who discovered the original manuscripts of Hrotsvit's works and published them in 1501.

Wilson's training in philology and rhetoric is a gossamer-thin academic robe through which Hrotsvit's artful writing sparkles. Hrotsvit wrote her dramas in answer to the pagan plays of Terence so that "the mind might be stirred to reflection, the heart to love, and the reader to moral improvement." Even modern readers will be moved by such elemental stories as "The Conversion of the Harlot Thais."

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A noble task, nobly done, / Full of virtue veiled with fun.

Caroline Morgan is a drama and art critic in New York City.

Decent Folk From Georgia

by Stephen L. Tanner

Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Ann Burns, New York: Ticknor & Fields.

"Livin' is like pourin' water out of a tumbler into a dang Coca-Cola bottle. If'n you skeered you cain't do it, you cain't. If'n you say to yoreself, 'By dang, I can do it!' then, by dang, you won't slosh a drop." This sample of dialogue conveys something of the tone, language, and philosophy of *Cold Sassy Tree* (the title refers to a small Georgia town, named for a shady sassafras tree). The man pouring life into a Coca-Cola bottle is a self-reliant, one-armed 59-year-old storeowner who scandalizes his children and the entire community by marrying the town milliner just three weeks after the death of his wife of many years. Begun as a marriage of convenience, the relationship grows to a passionate and edifying love. The year is 1906, and the story is narrated by the man's 14-year-old grandson, who, as an intimate witness of the love story, gains a valuable awareness of human needs and motivations.

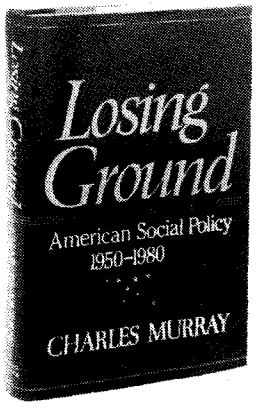
The novel furthers the rich tradition of American humor born in the South. The young sensitive narrator, the vernacular idiom, the homely similes, the practical jokes and tall tales, and the satire of small-town hypocrisy are reminiscent of Mark Twain. The chatty Southern dialect calls to mind Eudora Welty. And Olive Ann Burns deserves to be mentioned in the same paragraph with such writers. Though a first novel, this is distinguished fiction. According to an autobiographical letter, she wanted to prove "that a book about essentially decent people could be a page-turner without explicit sex and constant violence." She was tired of current sordid stories of unsavory people "who have no self-respect and no respect for anybody or any institutions."

She proves her point in a thoroughly engaging and often moving novel that illuminates afresh and without the cynicism and sensationalism of much current fiction the old elemental themes of love and death and adolescent initiation.

The recreation of a small Southern community in the first decade of our century is masterful. The author, a former writer for the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, relied heavily on her own experiences growing up in Commerce, Georgia, and on family history systematically gathered from her parents. Her father, who like the narrator was 14 in 1906, was one of those master storytellers whose style is not cramped by the truth. Among his stories was one about her grandfather, "who married three weeks after his wife died and who said he loved Miss Annie but she was dead as she'd ever be and he had to git him another wife or hire a housekeeper one, and it would just be cheaper to git married." This was the germ of her novel, which is fleshed out imaginatively to encompass love among the old as well as the young, the confrontation with death, the poignant ironies of racial and class relations, and both the comedy and injury of village small-mindedness.

To readers of current fiction who still believe the novel can be an edifying as well as entertaining reflection of ordinary life, *Cold Sassy Tree* will be reassuring.

Stephen L. Tanner is professor of English at Brigham Young University.



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DOES WELFARE HURT THE POOR?

LOSING GROUND

by Charles Murray

This profoundly influential book explains how the welfare state not only failed to help the poor, but often made things worse for the disadvantaged.

Murray's breakthrough work has had explosive impact on discussions of social policy in the '80s, and the reverberations will echo beyond the decade. This is the book social democrat Michael Harrington has called "dangerous," while such conservatives as Milton Friedman, William Buckley, Jack Kemp and Patrick Buchanan have hailed it as "brilliant."

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Letter From Managua

by Wallace Kaufman

A Devil's Dictionary From Nicaragua

Revolutions attempt to give new meaning to life. Sometimes changing the definition of words is part of the attempt to change reality. At other times, reality changes first. Nowhere does the traveler have more old words with new meanings than in revolutionary Nicaragua. To help those whose first days in the country are as confused as mine, here is an abridged dictionary of the revolution (with apologies to Ambrose Bierce):

Agricultural loan: a government loan to large or small farmer carrying the patriotic interest rates of 20 to 30 percent rather than the 10 percent rate that the government considers "imperialistic" in international lending.

Air conditioners: machines that cool people as they do in other countries, but here they are also political markers found mainly in the following places: pro-government radio and television stations, offices of high government officials, and Marxist-Leninist bookstores. In this classless, workers' state where most people dress alike, seeking out the air conditioners is a good way to find the important communists.

Alfabeticizacion: the national literacy campaign somewhat like the U.S. program "Hooked on Books" but based on the theory that politics makes good reading if it is full of revolutionary action and party politics: C is for Carlos (founder of the Sandinista Party); G is for Guerrillero; F is for Fusil (rifle); by Lesson 4 a student can read "The FSLN (Sandinista party) is the organization of the vanguard of the Nicaraguan people."

Blue jeans: one of the few permissible statements of affection for U.S. capitalism and its culture; the pants preferred by the younger government officials from middle-class backgrounds who still have some family money, relatives in the U.S., or who have traveled abroad on government junkets. Sometimes available on the black market for about five months' wages.

Brigadistas: members of the American and European middle class or bourgeoisie who come to the workers' state where they work for nothing ($10 a month less than the native workers) building schools and clinics or picking coffee for two weeks or a month before returning home to their bourgeois jobs or to attend college on the money provided by their bourgeois parents or their imperialistic government.

Burguesia: anyone who used to make a living without a government license or economic aid; people who used to have air conditioners; in the Marxist-Leninist literature of Nicaragua, *bourgeoisie* has the same function as the word *devil* in Christian writing, although it appears more frequently.

Bus: a relatively rare species of vehicle in which crowds are often used to immobilize and numb travelers so wealth can be redistributed manually. Recently riders have complained that drivers have developed a Fagan-like patronage for pickpockets.

Cordoba: the official currency and the best bargain in Nicaragua since every day an American dollar buys more and more. A one cordoba coin is used for pay phones, the world's greatest phone bargain. But since it takes 100 of them to equal a nickel, almost no one carries them and you can never find one when you need to make a call.

Democracy (workers'): the process whereby workers and campesinos may offer constructive Marxist ideas to improve production and the Sandinista system of government.

Democracy (capitalist): distinguished from workers' democracy by its diversionary emphasis on elections to decide what party and which persons will run the government. Commandante Bayardo Arce called the 1984 elections "a nuisance" necessary to placate foreign observers.

Free speech: "Thought that is correct, that is with the revolution" (President Daniel Ortega).

FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front): the political party whose red and black flag flies on government buildings more often than the national flag; that political party which allows the fewest number of official members but which controls the greatest number of guns; the only political party in

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies, edited by Robert Lance Snyder, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; $29.50. Sixteen critics look at a troubled Romantic whose works "bristle with the images of an imperial self."

William Shakespeare by Terry Eagleton, New York: Basil Blackwell; $14.95. Marxist, feminist, and semiotic theories combine to show us that the witches are "the heroines" of *Macbeth* and the center of "positive value"—even if a "conservative patriarch" like Shakespeare could not see it this way. "This way madness lies. . . . "

The Language of the Heart: The Body's Response to Human Dialogue by James L. Lynch, New York: Basic Books; $19.95. A leading psychophysiologist explains why we pay for stressful speech with our heart's blood—unless we're schizophrenic.

Hollywood: Legend and Reality, edited by Michael Webb, Boston: Little, Brown; $19.95. An engrossing collection of memorabilia, gathered for a Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition, gives us a close-up on the world of stardom, from the days of Fatty Arbuckle and Mary Pickford to Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood.

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Latin America with its own army; the political party that "exercises control in the name of the workers . . . or to put it another way, the workers control power through the FSLN" (Sandinista National Directorate, 1979).

"Heroes and Martyrs": a phrase used to distinguish government-approved organizations from their privately organized counterparts, e.g., CONAPRO is the independent Council of Professionals, and CONAPRO Heroes y Martires is the government-approved council allowed to participate in debate on the new constitution.

Hotel: the main interface between police and visitors. Hotels must report daily to police the names of all visitors in residence.

Inturismo: the tourist bureau whose official mission is to publicize and promote the Marxist-Leninist principles of the Sandinista party to bourgeois visitors from capitalist countries. Inturismo recently announced that its contribution to Nicaragua's "mixed economy" would be a $40 million gambling casino and resort on the Pacific coast, where all spending will be in dollars.

Lake Managua: the big empty lake that lies near Managua and one of the world's most polluted bodies of water. Government officials blame the pollution on the capitalists of Somoza's time, but seven years after the Revolution all the storm sewers and toilets of the capital still empty into the lake. It may be that some people's - - - - doesn't stink.

Private sector: a pejorative term referring to backward, paranoid, or greedy people who do not believe that their countrymen trained in Bulgaria, Romania, and the Soviet Union can run the Nicaraguan economy; also in the body politic of a Marxist workers' state, a vestigial economic structure similar in utility to the body's appendix; that part of the prerevolutionary business community whose survival serves as evidence of a "mixed economy."

Somocista: the name commonly used for anyone who suggests that communism might not be the best form of government for Nicaragua; also a legal term whose application to any person allows the government to legally confiscate his property and personal assets.

Taxi: a car that looks like it is taking a vacation from a demolition derby. The owners are actually waiting for spare parts to appear at the government parts depot. Visitors do not have to worry about a taxi breaking down on a long trip since the government will not let them leave their home town limits any day except Sunday.

Unions (independent): capitalist workers' organizations whose economic self-interest leads them to "separate themselves from the collective interest . . . because they do not see the whole picture with a patriotic conscience" (Minister of Labor).

Winter: one of the two seasons in Nicaragua, being the dry season when the temperature usually hovers near 100 degrees and when the country's failing pumps leave people without water two to five days a week. Summer is the rainy season by the end of which there is a little more water in the reservoirs but no more parts for the pumps.

Wallace Kaufman travels frequently in Latin America.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

What Ever Happened to Basket Weaving?

I try to be a calm and charitable person. But just when I have some of my smaller base urges under control—my flippancy, my latent cynicism—I trip in some new droppings of those sincere, well-meaning U.S. citizens whose rhetoric can't be distinguished from the Kremlin's, and am freshly undone. This time the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire, Inc., have sabotaged my resolve: I grow reckless with despair at such folks.

Let me say first that, judging by their handbooks, the Girl Scouts are as innocent as when *I* was one. They do not appear to deserve mention here. It's the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire persons (no longer is membership restricted to those of the female persuasion) who have bought—lock, stock, and loaded barrel—the peacenik point of view.

The Boy Scouts are by far the lesser of the two evils. To their credit, they don't once talk about the "arms race" in their handbook for the "Citizenship in the World" badge. In their discussion of different types of government, they start out straightforwardly enough on democracy and even begin well when they get to communism: "Communism is both an economic system and a political system. In these countries, political power lies in the hands of relatively few. Opposition to government is severely limited and there are few individual rights."

But did you know that:

—"Central planning is the chief feature of communism"?
—"Cuba is the only communist nation in the Western Hemisphere"? (This, in a handbook claiming to be a 1985 printing of a 1984 revision.)
—"Tension and conflict arise between democratic nations and communist nations because their ways of life are based on different *ideologies*"?
—"The aim of communism is the equal distribution of goods and wealth"?

There is no mention of communism's imperative atheism, which, since "A Scout is reverent," surprises me. And the Boy Scouts also wear green blinders (or are they red?) when examining "military dictatorships": "Examples of countries ruled by a military dictatorship are Libya, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Chile."

Maddening as this is, the *correct* parts are perhaps a beginning of enlightenment. We can't give our kids the kind of history books we proffer now and expect them to swallow whole the *real* truth of the world; they need it in little doses. This is especially true if, as the Camp Fire handbook "In Pursuit of Peace" claims, "Young people are crying out for a chance to interact with caring adults who are not afraid to admit that they are scared, too."

Here are some examples of what Camp Fire, Inc., obviously thinks is wrongful, counterproductive thought expressed by misled "adolescents recently interviewed about war, peace, and nuclear issues":

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—"Peace is a vague concept, simply the absence of war. Peace is something like milk toast—weak, passive and boring." (Now *really*–do *you* know any 15-year-olds who have heard of milk toast or would use language like that?)
—"Nobody is doing much about peace. We are powerless."
—"The future may never come and it probably will not be better than today." (Huh?)

So far, so good; I agree that these are bad attitudes. But then we come to "The Soviets are the enemy," and I would appreciate an iota of evidence that *this* is an illogical conclusion to draw.

In 1983 the Camp Fire Congress approved a resolution "encouraging the development of peacemaking skills among children, youth and families for their homes, communities, nation, and world," because "people everywhere are concerned about war and peace. We must find solutions to the problems which threaten our very existence on this earth." (Didn't you just *know* that phrase was coming!) "The words of Gandhi tell us where to begin—with our children. It is young children who can most easily acquire the qualities needed to create a peaceful world—caring, responsibility, ability to resolve conflict, and hope for the future."

"Children are exposed to more talk about war and the threat of nuclear destruction than most adults realize. At an early age, children can become very frightened by what they see and hear of world news. Many children feel helpless in a threatening world." And apparently most of the threatening is being done by Camp Fire leaders.

To ameliorate this hideous situation, Camp Fire offers two programs. "A Gift of Peace" is for kids in grades 1 through 6, and "In Pursuit of Peace" is for "older youth and adults." "A Gift of Peace" is basically innocent—or would be, in the proper hands. Under the chapter subheading "Today's Peacemakers," though, is the suggestion to "Learn about a peacemaker who has been helping to create a more peaceful world during the lifetime of the children. They may remember Samantha Smith, who wrote a letter to the leaders of the U.S.S.R. asking for peace." (My thoughts about the media making a national icon of a child because she thinks like a child do not belong in this family magazine.) In "A Gift of Peace," kids learn about being a friend and that "no two people see the same situation in exactly the same way," both good things for children to learn. On the other hand, they are encouraged to read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, along with Dr. Seuss's blatantly political *The Butter Battle Book*. (A full-grown peacenik I know adores *Sadako* and, when he's not holding a lit candle on the capitol steps or writing letters to the editor or flying—God help us!—to Helsinki, spends his time making paper cranes and tying them to his neighbors' trees, to their extreme consternation; when he finishes the thousandth, presto! There Will Be Peace—unless he gets a tail full of shot first.)

"In Pursuit of Peace," for older kids, is meatier, especially towards the end. In an activity section called "The Nuclear Threat," young adults are advised to "View a movie on nuclear war or attend a lecture or other presentation on nuclear war where some people with expert knowledge are present." (And of *course* a pro-defense expert is always invited to such lectures and presentations. . . .) "Several excellent movies are available from local libraries, peace groups, schools and churches. 'In the Nuclear Shadow' is a series of interviews with young people. 'The Last Epidemic' and 'The Day After' are descriptions of what would happen if a bomb were dropped on a major city. 'The Race Nobody Wins' describes the damages and costs of the international arms race."

After all this, it's nice to find that there *is* a solution to our tribulations, this powder keg we sit on, and that young Camp Fire persons will be able to help *change* the world, in a very concrete way, instead of just *talking* about it like those silly diplomats: "Become involved in a peacemaking project with others. Every community has peacemaking groups and projects involving such activities as making paper cranes, making peace quilts or ribbons, creating art exhibits, and writing letters to world leaders." Of *course*! How could we all have been such *fools*? An activist at heart, I shall start my quilt today.

Nineteen eighty-six is the U.N.-declared "Year of Peace," which, looking back at the events of the year, would tend to make me worry about 1987—if the declaration weren't as meaningless and insubstantial as most other U.N. pronouncements. And I'm here to tell you that yes, I'm scared, I'm crying out for a chance to interact with *other* caring adults who are not afraid to admit that they are scared, too—and mad as hell: Most of us have been giving money to these two groups for years, whether we know it or not.

Jane Greer edits Plains Poetry Journal *and will publish this essay in a book when she has enough others to go with it.*

BOOKS IN BRIEF—ASIAN

The Making of a Moonie—Choice or Brainwashing **by Eileen Barker, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.** The most thorough report to date on the mechanics and operation of the Unification Church. Eileen Barker concludes that neither traditional Christians nor stable atheists are likely to be attracted, for long, to the UC, but for the unhappy and alienated denizens of a secularizing world, Mr. Moon offers sanctuary and a sense of community. Partly because of her exclusive focus on Britain, she must leave unanswered such compelling questions as the UC's financial dealings, their influence over the American conservative movement, and the remarkable ability of so few people to have so great an impact. Barker is particularly strong on sociological analysis of opinion surveys, but somewhat weak in investigative reporting. Prominent ex-Moonies are not remarked upon.

Hsieh Ping-Ying: Autobiography of a Chinese Girl, **translated by Tsui Chi with an introduction by Elisabeth Croll, London: Pandora Press (Routledge & Kegan Paul).** The moving tale of a Chinese girl born at the turn of the century. First published in 1936, Hsieh Ping-Ying recounts her rebellion against old China and her evolution into a leading woman writer. A social rebel, a soldier, a writer, she paid the usual price for her liberation: estrangement from her family and from her civilization.

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Why Don't We Do It in the Road?

A pathologist who recently moved from Vermont to North Carolina has written an article in the *American Journal of Forensic Sciences* about the old Southern custom of lying in the road. The good doctor was apparently unacquainted with this practice, and he was upset to discover that every couple of weeks, on the average, one of my fellow Tar Heels gets run over and killed when engaged in it. Driven by the Yankee passion to explain things, this fellow argues that most of the fatalities are drunks looking for a warm place to sleep it off, who have the misfortune to choose poorly lighted country roads. They don't do this sort of thing in Vermont, he concludes, because the roads aren't warm enough.

Speaking of alcohol, my state, like many others, is in the process of raising its drinking age to 21. That strikes me as a singularly silly thing to be doing, but let's give the other side a fair hearing. Why would a reasonable person believe that raising the drinking age is a good idea?

As I understand it, the argument has something to do with the specter of drunken teenagers driving around killing people, and, God knows, that's a sobering thought. Nobody—not even I for the sake of argument—thinks drunk teenage drivers are a Good Thing. Let's get that straight, to begin with.

But I'd as soon be hit by a drunk teenager as by a drunk octogenarian. And isn't the question really that of when people become adults, responsible for their own behavior? Obviously it depends on the individual, but if we must have a universal, agreed-upon fiction, shouldn't it be something less than 21? I read somewhere that there used to be 17-year-old clipper-ship captains. If we treat 20-year-olds like children, can we reasonably expect them to behave like grown-ups? Are we going to extend adolescence until it meets middle age?

Think about it. At 18 you can join the armed forces without parental consent. I've never bought the argument "If they're old enough to fight, they're old enough to vote." Dogs fight. But if they're old enough to fight, surely they're old enough to *drink*. Are you telling me all those jarheads from Camp Lejeune are supposed to sit around drinking root beer?

And certainly if they're old enough to *vote*, they're old enough to drink. The 18-year-old vote now enshrined

in our Constitution means we trust these beardless youths and gentle maidens to decide between Democrats and Republicans. Why can't we trust them enough to decide whether to face the world drunk or sober? (And given some of the alternatives our politics produces these days, a few belts might help with that choice, too.)

But there is the statistical argument. Apparently 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds tend more often than their elders to get drunk and run their cars into stationary objects and their fellow citizens. I'd be curious to see the statistics on 16- and 17-year-olds. I'll bet that they kill themselves and others pretty often, too, with or without the assistance of liquor. This suggests an alternative solution, one more consistent and, to me at least, more philosophically satisfying: Raise the *driving* age. At 18, let people drink, drive, vote, enlist, get married, go to the gas chamber—pretend, that is, that they're grown-up human beings.

But my real objection to North Carolina's raising its drinking age has to do with why we're doing it. We are not doing it for the good indigenous reason that a lot of our citizens think liquor is the Devil's brew. Our legislators ignored that sentiment readily enough when they approved local option on liquor-by-the-drink to appeal to tourists and conventioneers too dumb to figure out how brown bagging works. No, our drinking age is being raised because our Federal highway funds will be cut if it isn't.

This is being done by the same legislators who recently passed a law requiring the use of seat belts in automobiles—not because they were convinced that the previous absence of such a requirement was a mistake, but because some unelected bureaucrats in Ronald Reagan's Department of Transportation threatened to put exploding bags in the front seats of our cars if they didn't. Roughly the same Federales decided a few years ago that North Carolina's school buses were the wrong color. When they threatened to cut off our welfare if we didn't repaint them, our state officials rolled over for that one, too.

This craven capitulation to Federal displeasure is getting out of hand, and I think the drinking age is as good a place as any to draw the line. Yes, I know the Yankees have the Bomb now, but what the heck—let's make them use it. Where is the patriot to tell Washington to take its highway money and go to hell? Where is the Patrick Henry to say we've already got too damn many highways? If we build more, folks will just lie in them.

John Shelton Reed comments on public policy from the security of a tenured position at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

M·O·V·I·N·G·?

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On 'Old Adam, New Eve':

Thomas Fleming's article, "Old Adam, New Eve" (Perspective, June 1986) failed to mention the women in the line of fire between feminists and traditionalists.

Sure, we all decry militant feminists who want to turn science, the sexes, art and, indeed, all society into a progressive's hodgepodge of leftist doctrine and Marxist utopia.

But what about us hybrids? As a single professional woman, I peer over stacks of unfinished paperwork and see mothers pushing their strollers along shady streets outside my office window. But I don't envy them during the day any more than I do at night when I'm dancing downtown or quietly writing, and they're chasing screaming kids as their husbands nod off during *Dallas*.

We hybrids believe that exchanging ideas, discussing goals and frustrations, and working together for a common purpose—whether it be organizing a magazine, introducing a new product, building a church, or helping someone through the ravages of an illness—reveal much more about a person's qualities than what his or her sex happens to be.

As for women in the work force, we hybrids work because: (A) We don't believe in welfare for the able-bodied; (B) We believe the desire for financial support from another human being should not be the criterion for tying up that other person's life and entangling him in our problems; and (C) Concepts of capitalism, free markets, and investment appeal to us on a personal, as well as philosophic, level.

Feminists take a machete to any suggestion that men and women are different. Fleming takes a machete to the feminist idea that there are no biological or psychological differences between men and women.

As proof of the inherent difference between men and women, Fleming claims that women desire feminine birthday gifts, such as perfume and flowers, while men prefer fishing rods, cigars, or golf clubs. Please, Mr. Fleming, don't encourage anyone to get me any more perfume. I already have several stale bottles. My brother (an Army officer) wants the same birthday gifts that I do: VCR tapes, new tires for the car, and, please God, fewer commercials during *Star Trek* reruns.

Feminists who, in Fleming's words, "desire to discredit sexist biology and psychology" and "debunk the old sexist stereotypes" are the ones who actually seek to accentuate the differences between the sexes. Those advocating government-run day-care centers, comparable worth, affirmative action for women, abortion on demand, and unilateral disarmament do so on the basis that because women are different from men, they need special privileges and have special insight into the world's problems.

One of the reasons feminists have been able to "drag an entire society against the grain of human nature" and proceed with "vandalizing a civilization" is because both men and women have passively let them do so.

Each new court-ordered tearing down of traditional morals is met with a few solitary groans, and then it's business as usual. Most people would prefer to watch weakly as their civilization collapses under coercive social engineering schemes than to fight back.

Caroline Miranda
North Hollywood, CA

I truly had thought that the days when blacks and women were supposed to "know their place" were over. Apparently, more education is required.

As for "plans to drag an entire society against the grain of human nature," feminists realize, and anthropology and archaeology now document, that instead it is patriarchal culture which is in fact against the grain of human nature. The original matriarchal cultures, such as the neolithic site of Catal Huyuk in Turkey, demonstrate that the woman-centered way of life was extraordinarily abundant and extremely peaceful, unlike the poverty-prone and disharmonious man-centered cultures of today.

In those times more in harmony with nature, woman's ability to give birth, to bring forth life, was perceived as Divine. As such, women consequently were regarded as the authorities when it came to religious rites and political functions. And the former explanation of "fertility goddesses" for all the female statuettes that have been unearthed all over the world has had to expand to further define fertility as "inventive" and "creative," since evidence indicates it was women who developed the arts of civilization such as agriculture, domestication of animals, ceramics, and weaving.

In these matriarchal cultures, as in current Navajo tradition, name and property come down through the mother. And chiefs and warriors were selected by the Council of Women to defend the clan if necessary, so that women could be free to tend to the critical functions of civilization: food, medicine, shelter, clothing, etc. A remnant of woman's absolute authority, the power of Mom to say "no," was still going on in the Iroquois tribe less than a century ago. If the Council of Women felt that the male warriors were pursuing an unjust war, the women withheld the moccasins and trail food essential for the quest. When women shut down their industry, men

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had no choice but to stay home and behave.

I should also mention here women's record-keeping of moon-cycles and growing seasons scratched on bone, which led to the solstitial, equinoctial, and cross-quarter-day festivals at which women priests traditionally presided. As the record-keepers of their own cycles, and then of the larger cycles of nature, it was considered appropriate for women to be the priests, the interpreters and conveyors of life-knowledge. Likewise, as birth-givers, pottery-makers, and weavers, as creators, women were regarded as the true reflections of the ultimate Creator. Even the Bible refers to "the Great Goddess, whom all the world worships" (Acts 19:27). (In that region, She was known as Diana, but the Goddess had various names in various places, like the Jehovah, Allah, and Brahma of today.)

In a world then when Deity was feminine, man's principle status derived from his relationship to woman, as dutiful son or privileged paramour, but not as husband or father. Marriage, or ownership of a woman, was instituted by savage tribes such as the Hebrews who sought to ensure access to all the female civilizing comforts that the males could not provide for themselves.

By contrast, in the matriarchal cultures, males were but temporary lovers. And since fathers came and went, true parenthood was held ever to reside in the mother. Thus, the original social unit, and the most natural one, is solely mother and child, a reality which is documented by the countless mother and son statues at shrines throughout the ancient world.

Constance Robertson
Peoria, IL

Perhaps I am dead or dying, but my *favorite* gift is a book. Women sometimes need to escape from the "civilized" world, too. (Perhaps more so!)

Perfume is often made from animal products, and I am a vegetarian and do not believe in killing animals. That is beside the point, however. My dislike of frilly nightgowns (I sleep nude) and smelly perfume doesn't detract from my femininity.

Realizing my potential as a woman

(I am 24) has allowed me to free myself from female stereotypes. I demand nothing from men, nor from women. The earth and humanity provide me with all I need.

You could benefit from stepping out of your narrow views of men and women. Our biological differences are self-evident; our human similarities are exciting.

Carol Ziese
Pasadena, CA

The Editor Replies:

These three letters illustrate the range of responses to our issue on sex—from the thoughtful (Caroline Miranda) to the ideological (Constance Robertson) to the absurd (Carol Ziese).

There are, indeed, women caught in the middle. In a world where all value is determined by money, the women's role has been shrunk to the dimensions Miss Miranda complains of. But trying to pretend there is a middle ground between feminism and traditional society does not help matters. The main task of a healthy society is to reproduce itself, which means that intelligent women like Miss Miranda should be having more than two children and taking care of them in the critical years. If working women care about the future of our civilization, then they are, by their own choice, outside it. Remember the fate of the bat.

Constance Robertson has been reading up on Mutterrecht, it seems, instead of studying the vast output of feminist anthropology. There is not space here to do more than list her errors and direct her reading: There is *no* evidence that women have ever been politically dominant in a society. Matrilineal societies (which trace property and descent through the female line) are no less male-dominated than patrilineal cultures. Alice Schlegel (a feminist) has shown clearly that matriliny can be put on a gradient from brother-domination to husband-domination. In the middle, where the two sets of male relatives compete, women have the most authority, although they are still subordinate.

The example of the Iroquois is instructive. Like the ancient Spartans, the Iroquois were great militarists who spent much of their time on the war-path. This meant that women were left with all domestic management, food production, and much of the task of social regulation. As food-producers, they exercised a *de facto* and *de jure* veto power over expeditions. However, since the Iroquois were particularly harsh and abusive to their women (this puzzled the first "matriarchalist," L.H. Morgan), the veto was scarcely a common occurrence. Until recently, women may have never had it so bad.

There have been, of course, female deities in almost any culture that knew where babies come from; but alongside of mother goddesses there are, typically, male deities. Besides, the progress of civilization has, oddly enough, coincided with the rejection or demotion of goddesses, but if Ms. Robertson wants to bring back the good old days of Nineveh and Tyre, I would be the last one to stand in her way. The new Assyrians would nuke the Russians as soon as they had beaten American women into submission.

While the original social unit for mammals is the mother and child, most primates have more complex systems involving either a multimale group or a male-female bonding. In the most recent attempt to synthesize a theory of hominid origins, Quiatt and Kelso emphasize the sexual bond in promoting social cooperation. For as long as man has been man, we have lived in families that practiced a division of labor by sex. "Nature," as Shaw put it, "is what you call immoral."

Finally, I would like to reassure Carol Ziese. She is free to use most perfumes while she sleeps in the nude: natural civet, musk, and ambergris are generally too rare to be used in anything but the most expensive products. By the way, the only males I know who are "excited by similarities" do not, for obvious reasons, go out with women.

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SCREEN

Critic's Choice

by Sam Karnick

***Hannah and Her Sisters*; written and directed by Woody Allen; Orion Pictures.**

Like any civilized society, America reveres its artists. Unfortunately, in this as in most other things, we tend to go overboard. Consequently, we are all too often subjected to the spectacle of a ludicrous buffoon like Gore Vidal on national television pontificating on public policy questions, or a Norman Mailer—a man who once stabbed one of his six wives—being taken seriously by the New York Parole Board, with horrifying consequences.

The worst aspect of this unquestioning reverence, however, is the deleterious effect it has on the artists themselves. The road from storyteller to sage is a perilous one indeed.

So it has been for Woody Allen. His first two films, *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1967) and *Take the Money and Run* (1969), were fitfully amusing trifles. Over the next few years, he began to learn his craft as a filmmaker, and his movies got better, although they still suffered from the superficiality, emphasis on gags over character development, and tendency to repeat endless variations on the same joke evident in his 1960's output.

Then, in 1977, came Allen's breakthrough film, both commercially and artistically: *Annie Hall*. There was no longer any room for disagreement. Woody Allen was an artist, and one of great significance at that. Further forays into this same territory, such as *Interiors* (1978) and *Manhattan* (1979), produced similarly glowing praise.

Now it's clear, of course, that the reason the critics were praising Allen for his acerbic insights into American life was not that he was writing about ordinary Americans, but that he was writing about *them*: the self-proclaimed American intelligentsia. They couldn't care less about the lives of ordinary Americans, but, oh, did they love to hear jokes about McLuhan, Freud, and Kierkegaard.

And yet, even during these last 10 years, when Allen has enjoyed almost universal respect, there have been disturbing notes, which even his most ardent admirers have felt forced to acknowledge, however obsequiously and reverently.

There was, first of all, the appalling dourness of *Interiors*. The film was clearly a pale imitation of Bergman, which most critics duly pointed out, simply changing the word "pale" to "brilliant." If they had trouble with *Interiors*, however, they should really have been scared, for worse was yet to come, at least from their perspective. In *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *Zelig* (1983), Allen attacked the very famemongers who had been so kind to him. Like suburban parents whose child has come home a member of a motorcycle gang, they asked, "Where, oh where, did we go wrong?"

Where they had gone wrong, of course, was in imputing too much affection to Allen's earlier satire of themselves. He had never liked them as much as they had thought, and when he made it clear, the criticism stung. Most, however, failed to realize this and stuck by him, hoping he'd come back around.

Well, he has, after a fashion, and all has been forgiven. Last year's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* was just the sort of muddled nonsense the American intelligentsia adores, and *Hannah and Her Sisters*, while better, is unfortunately more of the same. While *Purple Rose* was lugubrious throughout, *Hannah* is a return to the comic form. Unfortunately, Allen seems determined in this film not to be too funny, lest he not be taken seriously by the critics. So when a scene threatens to become too pleasurable—as when Mickey, his hypochondriacal TV producer, finds out he may really be dying of a brain tumor—Allen cuts the ensuing scene short and quickly races off to another story.

Allen tries to do too many things in *Hannah*, and the film cracks under the strain. Certainly the most entertaining, humorous, and insightful aspect of the film is the story of Mickey's realization that he will someday die, and his comic/pathetic attempts to find faith. This plot parallels something that has been going on in Allen's own life—as is clear both from his films and interviews—but since he apparently hasn't solved the problem for himself, he is at a loss as to how to solve it for his character. So he relegates Mickey to secondary status in the film's narrative scheme, which is a shame. We've seen Allen's search for belief coming out in his films more and more clearly recently, and he is to be commended for this. In *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* there is a serious concern with spiritualism, and the ending hopefully posits the existence of an afterlife. *Broadway Danny Rose* and *Hannah* set major scenes at Thanksgiving celebrations, and in *Stardust Memories* a group of extraterrestrials reproaches Sandy, Allen's alter ego in the film, for "asking the wrong questions" and being too pessimistic. If Allen's over-reaching in his aesthetic forms is unwelcome, certainly his outreach on the spiritual side is a hopeful trend. Unfortunately, he has a few other problems to solve on the way.

Woody Allen's real problem is simply that he is not a very efficient storyteller. Yet he must be praised for recognizing this fact and working, throughout his career, to minimize its effects. Thus the use of voice-overs, fantasy sequences, asides to the audience, printed titles, allusions to other

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films and works of literature, and borrowings from other people's plots all add to his ability to get his points across while minimizing his deficiencies as a storyteller. And, as it turns out, most critics have praised him for the bandages without noticing the wounds.

This formal eclecticism, however, is a disadvantage to him as a filmmaker in two important ways. First, the devices don't always work: in *Annie Hall* the voice-overs add insight to the characters while moving the story along, while in *Hannah* they are merely used to impart information which the author is unable or unwilling to fit into the dramatic context. Second, the devices serve as a crutch and distract him from what he does best. If Woody Allen has one tremendous talent, it's his ability to create memorable, enlightening characters: Alvy Singer, Annie Hall, Leonard Zelig, Danny Rose, Lou Canova, Mickey—any aspiring comic artist would kill to be able to create such a gallery of characters. But Allen feels pressed to "grow," so he creates self-conscious homages to Bergman, Fellini, Shakespeare, etc. The more ambitious he becomes, the more his films suffer.

When Woody Allen has trusted his characters to lead us wherever they want to go, as in *Annie Hall*, *Stardust Memories*, and *Broadway Danny Rose*, he has created some of the finest films of the post-Hollywood period. One can only hope he tunes out the critics and tunes in again to his own characters.

Sam Karnick is a screenwriter who lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

STAGE

The House That John Built

by David Kaufman

In the 1980 film *Atlantic City*, Burt Lancaster, portraying a has-been racketeer, turns to a young companion while they're walking along the Boardwalk and exclaims, "You should have seen the Atlantic Ocean in the old days." According to Louis Malle, the film's director, the producers wanted to cut that line: "They said it didn't make any sense, the ocean hadn't changed. Mais oui! But that was pure John—the way the Lancaster character lived in the past." (Actually, it's pure Oscar Wilde who describes an old Confederate's response to a full moon: "You should have seen it before the war.")

The "John" here is John Guare, whose screenplay for *Atlantic City* has been, according to received opinion, eclipsed not by any subsequent work but by his 1971 opus, *The House of Blue Leaves*, currently revived in New York. Although the new production has been welcomed as a play for all seasons, the implicit message to the rave reviews is that they don't write plays like they did in the good old days—15 years ago—when not only the ocean, but also our theater, was still something to behold. With its references to the war in Vietnam, its extended subplot involving an assassination plan, and its zany characters who seem distinctly "60's," *The House of Blue Leaves* already strikes us as an artifact.

Swoosie Kurtz in a scene from John Guare's The House of Blue Leaves *at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Center.*

Even the circumstances which Guare recalled some years ago to describe the writing of the script seem to refer to another epoch, one which put its trust in arcane, Eastern mythologies: "I was writing this play and I was completely lost. . . . All these characters kept growing up around me, and I didn't know where I was going. So in desperation I threw the I Ching and asked it what the play was about. 'The family is the microcosm,' it said. Everything came into focus, I finished the play, and then someone told me I'd made a mistake, I'd thrown the I Ching sideways or upside down—I'd gotten the wrong hexagram! . . . But wrong turned out right for me."

"Right" in this case produced one Artie Shaughnessy, a Central Park zoo-keeper and mediocre singer who has dreams of making it big as a songwriter in Hollywood. Artie resides in the Sunnyside section of Queens (a familiar habitat for Guare) with his wife, Bananas. Bananas went what her nickname designates: "A year ago—two years ago today—two days ago today? Today." In a monologue, she recalls that fateful day when at the intersection of 42nd Street and Broadway she impersonated a gypsy cabdriver and gave Cardinal Spellman, Jackie Kennedy, Bob Hope, and President Johnson a lift. But their "suitcases spill open and Jackie Kennedy's wigs blow down Forty-Second Street and Cardinal Spellman hits me and Johnson screams and I hit him. I hit them all. And then . . . [the car] blew four flat tires and sinks and I run to protect the car. . . . And cars are honking at me to move. I push the car over the bridge back to Queens. You're asleep. I turn on Johnny Carson to get my mind off and there's Cardinal Spellman and Bob Hope whose nose is still bleeding and they tell the story of what happened to them and everybody laughs. Thirty million people watch Johnny Carson and they all laugh. At me. At me. I'm nobody. I knew all those people better than me. . . . I know everything about them. Why can't

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they love me?"

On the subject of sanity versus insanity, Guare is—and therefore we are—far more sympathetic with Bananas. In all of his works, Guare focuses on paradoxes and regards them frequently by inverting our expectations. In *Bosoms and Neglect*, for example, Scooper tells Deidre, his new "girlfriend," that "you become saner much quicker than you go mad."

Although Bananas is the certifiable looney who is about to be carted off to the eponymous House of Blue Leaves, according to Guare's subtext, Bananas is the sanest character of the bunch, while all those who pass through Artie's apartment are the real residents of *this* peculiar, poignant House of Blue Leaves: Bunny Flingus, Artie's downstairs neighbor, with whom he's having wild and frequent sex but who refuses to cook for him until they get married ("My cooking is the only thing I got to lure you on with and hold you with. Artie, we got to keep some magic for the honeymoon"); Artie and Banana's son, Ronnie, who has gone AWOL from Fort Dix in order to carry out his plan to assassinate the Pope during his visit to New York to plead for an end to the war (Bunny shows up near the end of Act I with a large "I Love Paul" button: "They ran out of Welcome Pope buttons so I ran downstairs and got my leftover from when the Beatles were here!"); Billy Einhorn, Artie's childhood pal who is now a successful Hollywood producer; and Corrinna Stroller, Billy's concubine actress who went deaf during an accident on the set.

Superficially, *The House of Blue Leaves* is an updated version of *Arsenic and Old Lace* or *You Can't Take It With You* or that genre of theatrical comedy which has prompted more than one critic to liken Guare to George Abbott. But as Frank Rich has claimed, "At its best [*The House of Blue Leaves*] often seems like *The Day of the Locust* as rewritten by Tennessee Williams."

Beneath the laugh-riot chaos, each of the inmates of Guare's Blue Leaves asylum is lovable and ostensibly harmless. And lest it seem like the dismissable black comedy it ultimately proves to be, Guare weaves a theme into the shenanigans, a message about the motivation to be recognized, the ambition to be famous. It appears early, when Bunny says in one of the more memorable lines, "When famous people go to sleep at night, it's us they dream of, Artie. The famous ones—they're the real people. We're the creatures of their dreams. You're the dream. I'm the dream. We have to be there for the Pope's dream." It reappears later as the pivotal cause of Banana's breakdown. For Artie, it serves as his *raison d'être*. But it's Billy who has the final say on the matter, in a reversal of logic which typifies all of Guare's work: "Bananas, do you know what the greatest talent in the world is? To be an audience. Anybody can create. But to be an audience . . . be an audience . . . "

The House of Blue Leaves finally is both more and less than Guare's homage to the Common Man. Its limitation is that a mere 15 years after it was written, it already seems dated by its relentless references to a specific era, if not to the sentiment that seemed peculiar to that era. Even Ronnie's assassination plot attaches the work to that same three-year period that spawned *Taxi Driver* and *Nashville* and countless other vehicles that bore a manufactured self-importance for dwelling on so "relevant" a topic. While it is hard to imagine a more effective Bananas than Swoosie Kurtz, the more enduring qualities that Guare might have achieved in this work are now dwarfed by the distance from which we have to view the entire enterprise. Our perspective is now that of an anthropologist observing a foreign culture—in this case, our own recent past.

In fact, one of the more consistent, if less pronounced, themes in Guare's work revolves around the past and how it is glorified and romanticized as a way of avoiding a less than satisfactory present. Guare himself is obsessed with the past, either as a retreat or as an inevitability, a shelter or an inescapable source informing the present. In *Bosoms and Neglect*, a mother tells her (obviously autobiographical) son, "I'm this old woman who does not want to live in the past and I have this son who is like living in a time capsule. They call it the past because it's over with, done, passed. Bury him with his copy of *Gone With the Wind*." (*Bosoms and Neglect* had a mere four-day run when it opened on Broadway in 1979, but it deserved far wider attention. As Ross Wetzsteon claims in his 1982 profile on Guare for *New York Magazine*, "Although it ran only four days on Broadway, a hundred thousand people claim to have seen it, one of those smash hits everywhere but at the box office.")

Unfortunately, it was far from a "smash hit" with the critics. Even the more modest but outstanding Off-Off-Broadway revival of the work this past spring, in the midst of what can be viewed as a Guare renaissance, was surprisingly ignored or renounced as a failure for what was perceived as an unresolved incongruity between Acts I and II.

The reference to *Gone With the Wind* indirectly confirms the suspicion of autobiography even as it prefigures and alludes to Guare's most ambitious project to date—his great dramatic epic, a trilogy of plays, depicting America's moral evolution and deterioration following the Civil War. But Guare's grand opus has yet to be seen in the perspective for which it was intended. In *Gardenia*, *Lydie Breeze*, and most recently *Women and Water*, Guare conceived of a late-19th-century, self-contained utopian community that was undermined by its naiveté, its innocence, and its inherent corruption. The most powerful and influential force in these plays is not the set of ideals which brought these figures together before we meet them, rather the past, which becomes a series of somewhat mysterious and impulsive events that victimize the characters in the present.

In *Lydie Breeze* the year is 1895, and we're on Nantucket, where their Aipotu ("Utopia backwards") has been established. While one character exclaims that "the curtain is about to go up on a new century," a key figure in forming their glorious community is already bemoaning its dissolution, "We came here after the [Civil] War. You thought Walden was a dream? Walden was a Buffalo Bill Wild West Show compared to the austere moral splendor of our model community."

As a metaphor for the infection that would prove the undoing of his hypothetical community, Guare introduced a rampant strain of syphilis. Syphilis courses through these plays even as it connects the various characters and serves as the community's

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only identifiable legacy. The choice of syphilis was ineluctable for Guare, since it not only conjures up Ibsen (to whom Guare is paying deliberate homage in this series of plays), but it also suggests comparison with the more recent sexual utopianism of the 60's. But what is most useful to us today in Guare's grandiose scheme has been either overlooked or ridiculed by the critics who were singularly unimpressed. Both *Lydie Breeze* and *Gardenia* received devastating reviews when they opened within months of each other in New York early in 1982. The response was so fiercely negative, in fact, that Guare probably had no recourse but to withhold the third play in the trilogy. Though *Women and Water* has just this past year, or four years later, played at the Los Angeles Actors' Theater and at the Arena Stage in Washington, it has yet to even open in New York.

For the most part, the critics dwelt on the references to Ibsen and other literary giants, as well as on the general loftiness of Guare's aims; but all at the expense of even considering what Guare was driving at. On the basis of the critics' diatribes, one might conclude that Guare "borrowed" even his characters' names by lifting them from some literary context or other —Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore*, for example—rather than deriving them from the tombstones at a cemetery in Queens, as he did.

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John Simon concurred in *his* response to *Lydie Breeze*. "There are also numerous allusions to or quotations from Poe, Hawthorne, James, Whitman, and other ottocento Americana [where, I wonder, are Poe and James?], but neither solid relationships nor soaring dialogue to hold together this disjointed, garish, and vacuous claptrap." Frank Rich was equally inhospitable in his more crucial response for the *Times*: "*Lydie Breeze* seems to choke on literary references."

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But for both of these works, the problem may have less to do with what Guare actually offered and more with the climate that was there, or not there as the case may be, to receive them. One of Brustein's remarks suggests as much inadvertently: "To judge by *Lydie Breeze*, the task of encapsulating historical material within a theatrical anecdote has grown even more problematic today than in the time of O'Neill." The sad fact of the matter is that Guare's best plays—his most ambitious, most dense, and most instructive works—have yet to receive fair or proper analysis. The *Lydie Breeze* cycle was perceived as a pretentious or pseudoliterary exercise. But that response reflects not what Guare had to offer, so much as the frantic state our critics are in, behaving here like a band of starved detectives who finally had some clues to which to apply their trade. Not even subsequent productions (for *Lydie Breeze*, in Washington, DC, and just this past spring at Steppenwolf in Chicago; for *Gardenia*, in San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and at the Goodman in Chicago) could slough off the dead weight of the initial pans.

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David Kaufman is a theater critic in New York City.

ART

The Genius of Redundance

by Andrei Navrozov

"Simplicity," the Russian proverb tells us, "is worse than theft." Meaning, economy is just another name for sterility.

This is an easy thing to believe as I write this in the middle of London, the Old World piling up stone all around me in a paean to the unnecessary. But what is necessary? As Tolstoy calculated in his famous story, no man needs more than six feet of ground.

It is the same when not just life, but expression, is in question. In college, we were always asked to write essays on Donne's "A Valediction of weeping." Remember?

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definition, and "a round ball" is therefore redundant—as is the poet's strange need to anticipate a situation in which the cartographer, ready to get down to some serious mapmaking, suddenly discovers he has no supplies or tools. Besides, why "quickly"?

Anyway, the professors thought I was criticizing Donne. Indeed, wasn't "redundant" a bad word in the creative writing courses they had taken in their day, along with "rambling"? Yet genius always rambles—on and on, perpetually missing the point, effervescently redundant. That's what I wanted to say about John Donne.

Hope Garden *by Colleen Browning; oil on canvas; 38"×54½"; Kennedy Galleries.*

That's what I want to say now about Colleen Browning, whom I met this spring at the suggestion of this magazine's editor a few weeks before "Other Worlds," her new show, opened at Kennedy Galleries in New York. I am reasonably certain that Miss Browning will appreciate my earlier, seemingly roundabout introduction: Her father was a major general in the British Army, and she spent time drawing maps for the Royal Air Force during the war.

She was born and raised on her father's country estate in Cregg, County Cork, Ireland. A child prodigy at the age of 12, she began classes in drawing at an art school in Surrey and subsequently won a scholarship to the Slade School of Art in London, where she received her formal training. After a stint with the J. Arthur Rank Corporation as a set designer for a series of Rank films, Miss Browning had her first personal exhibition at the Little Gallery in London in 1949. That same year, she emigrated to the United States, settling in New York City. "Actually," she points out, "it was Harlem. But since I didn't know it, I didn't worry."

The paintings still faced the walls, waiting to be hung—the John Marin exhibit had to be taken down first—as Kennedy's Ken Quail was turning them around for Miss Browning and me one by one. The Russian proverb was going through my mind. There was nothing simple about these.

Arabesque, a painting in the show, is representative of one Browning theme, prominent in her last show at Kennedy in 1982 (*Fruit Market, Lily, Poinciana Pulcherrima, Under the Flamboyant, Danae, Metamorphoses, Night*, all dating from 1980-81, were included). The theme is symbiosis. The atmosphere makes one think of Gauguin, but somehow chastened: women in bathing suits and resort vegetation blend, limb on limb, with each other in a tangle of light and shadow. Browning's color is what makes this possible, as she glamorizes nature across the board, making color the common denominator of the animate and the inanimate (in the case of some paintings, such as the 1980 *Fruit Market*, the edible and the inedible). Her painting is so complex it makes one suspect the Old Masters of cutting corners; compared with her *Hope Garden* (in the new show), the Bosch *Gardens of Delight* seems Puritanical, a Protestant's notion of decadence, like oatmeal with fresh fruit.

The tropical complexities of *Hope Garden* cannot be explained by its physical location in Grenada, where Browning lives with her husband of nearly 40 years, the writer Geoffrey Wagner. An earlier theme of hers, graffiti-covered New York City subway trains, expressed in paintings with titles like *Clyde's Car* (1976) or *Sly's Eye* (1977), provided her with whatever she needed to portray the urban landscape (or rather, undergroundscape) with the same unerring passion for the redundant. "Catching the IRT full-stop," ran the *New York Post*'s snappy, if a little incomprehensible, headline before that show; the *Post* reporter made Miss Browning admit that subway graffiti was vandalism, "but I would be dishonest"—she held her ground—"if I didn't think it interesting. I don't think art should be moralistic, showing how the world should be. Because then you get all these Chinese posters of happy workers on tractors. Bad art and poor morality."

Whatever subject matter she chooses, as with all creative artists, it merely serves as a plot for her true subject, the weaving of natural forms into the fabric of color. The growth of the plot

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She was born and raised on her father's country estate in Cregg, County Cork, Ireland. A child prodigy at the age of 12, she began classes in drawing at an art school in Surrey and subsequently won a scholarship to the Slade School of Art in London, where she received her formal training. After a stint with the J. Arthur Rank Corporation as a set designer for a series of Rank films, Miss Browning had her first personal exhibition at the Little Gallery in London in 1949. That same year, she emigrated to the United States, settling in New York City. "Actually," she points out, "it was Harlem. But since I didn't know it, I didn't worry."

The paintings still faced the walls, waiting to be hung—the John Marin exhibit had to be taken down first—as Kennedy's Ken Quail was turning them around for Miss Browning and me one by one. The Russian proverb was going through my mind. There was nothing simple about these.

Arabesque, a painting in the show, is representative of one Browning theme, prominent in her last show at Kennedy in 1982 (*Fruit Market, Lily, Poinciana Pulcherrima, Under the Flamboyant, Danae, Metamorphoses, Night*, all dating from 1980-81, were included). The theme is symbiosis. The atmosphere makes one think of Gauguin, but somehow chastened: women in bathing suits and resort vegetation blend, limb on limb, with each other in a tangle of light and shadow. Browning's color is what makes this possible, as she glamorizes nature across the board, making color the common denominator of the animate and the inanimate (in the case of some paintings, such as the 1980 *Fruit Market*, the edible and the inedible). Her painting is so complex it makes one suspect the Old Masters of cutting corners; compared with her *Hope Garden* (in the new show), the Bosch *Gardens of Delight* seems Puritanical, a Protestant's notion of decadence, like oatmeal with fresh fruit.

The tropical complexities of *Hope Garden* cannot be explained by its physical location in Grenada, where Browning lives with her husband of nearly 40 years, the writer Geoffrey Wagner. An earlier theme of hers, graffiti-covered New York City subway trains, expressed in paintings with titles like *Clyde's Car* (1976) or *Sly's Eye* (1977), provided her with whatever she needed to portray the urban landscape (or rather, undergroundscape) with the same unerring passion for the redundant. "Catching the IRT full-stop," ran the *New York Post*'s snappy, if a little incomprehensible, headline before that show; the *Post* reporter made Miss Browning admit that subway graffiti was vandalism, "but I would be dishonest"—she held her ground—"if I didn't think it interesting. I don't think art should be moralistic, showing how the world should be. Because then you get all these Chinese posters of happy workers on tractors. Bad art and poor morality."

Whatever subject matter she chooses, as with all creative artists, it merely serves as a plot for her true subject, the weaving of natural forms into the fabric of color. The growth of the plot

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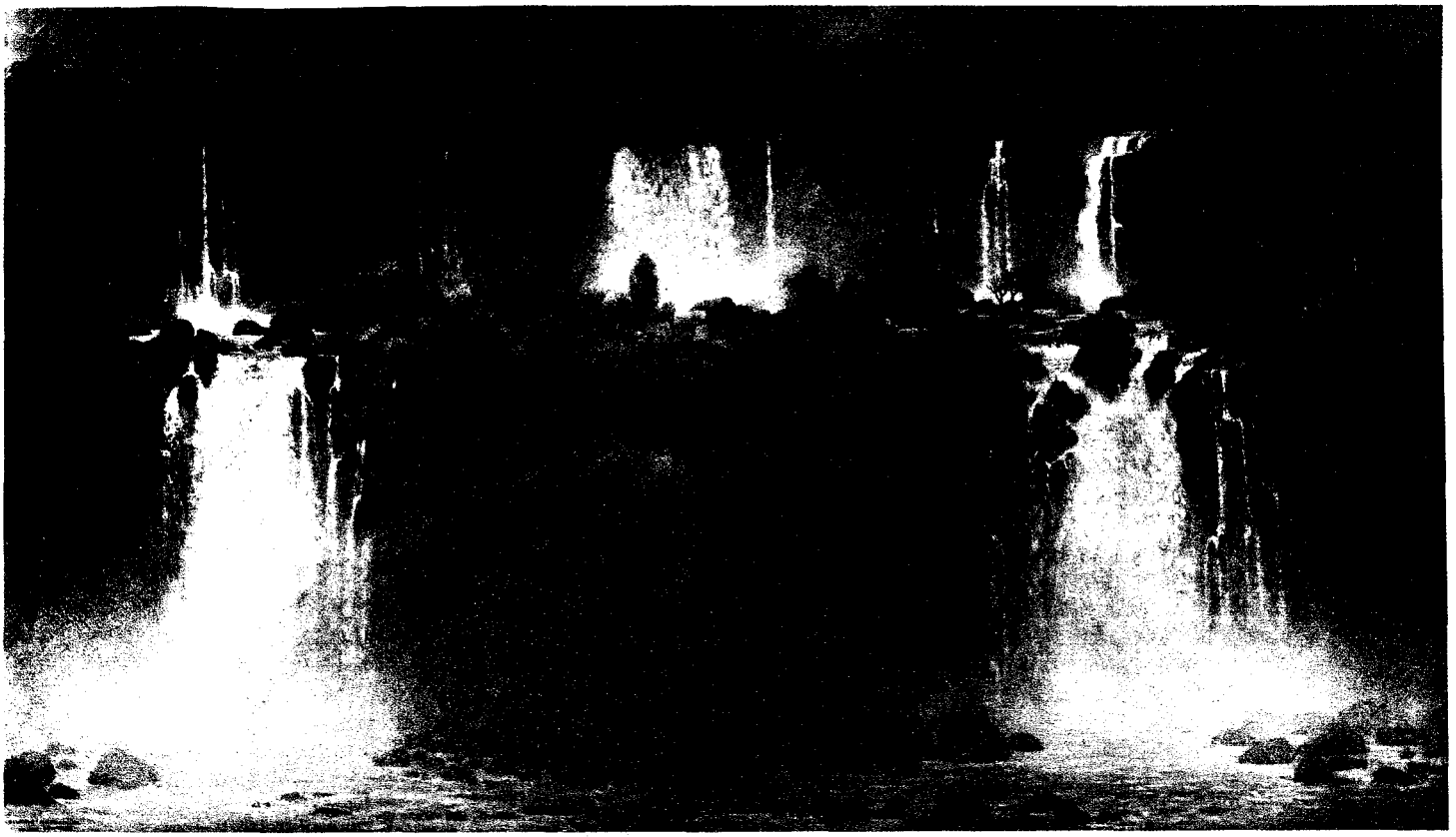
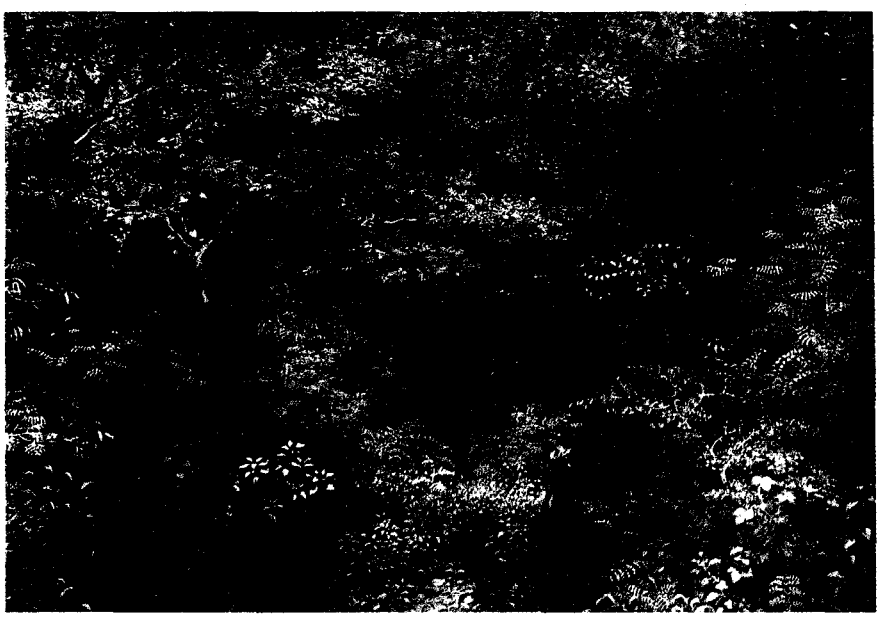


Paradise, 1985 *by Colleen Browning; oil on canvas; 41"×72"; Kennedy Galleries.*



The Walk to the Beach *by Colleen Browning; oil on canvas.*

into the actual picture is the pivotal moment of Browning's art.

Characteristically, with Browning's pictures the bigger the better is a rule. The infinitely proliferating flora in the "symbiotic" paintings seems to stretch the canvases physically, the botanical mass of sun-splashed green too lavish to be contained by the shallow picture plane. Perhaps instinctively prepared to compensate for the Pygmalion effect of her garden scenes, she starts the paintings on a much larger canvas than needed, "because painting is an organic thing," and later cuts it down to size. "Often present in the paintings," wrote a critic about Browning's last show, "is a half-hidden female, the changing light dappling her silhouette: it is Browning. We see her in moments of complete interpenetration with the realm of living things. . . . [These paintings] loom as colorful invitations to enter directly into the artist's sun-drenched world of horticultural splendor. It is something we do with lingering pleasure."

Here, then, is a painter who understands and feels life not as a proletarian amalgam of necessities, but as a capricious, tangled, organic whole filled with a changing light and a wind that, in the words of the Prophet, bloweth where it listeth. Life's luxuries and complexities—green, yellow, red—redundant as they are, become the art of Colleen Browning, and at that moment we know why we live.

Andrei Navrozov is poetry editor of Chronicles.

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